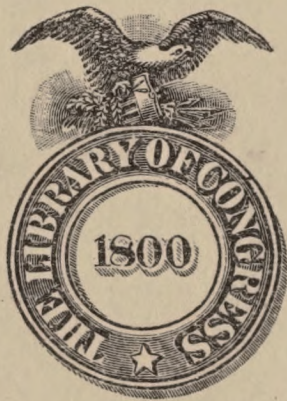




KING Of the
PLAINS ~



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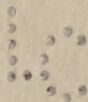
THE EXPLOSIVES LEAPED LIKE DANCING SERPENTS

KING OF THE PLAINS

STORIES OF RANCH
INDIAN, AND MINE

BY TIL. TILFORD, PAUL HULL
W. O. STODDARD, CHARLES
F. LUMMIS, M. E. M. DAVIS
AND OTHERS

ILLUSTRATED



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His Meeting with "The General"

PARTACUS," King of the Plains, came with a snort and a roar from the underbrush. His big eyes, glinting in the firelight like brindle door-knobs, looked over the shoulder of Blubbins, who was nearest. His back, which it took a tall man to see over, hid half the horizon.

"Great Scott!" cried Blubbins, reaching feebly for his gun.

McCormick stared helplessly at the stars.

"Don't ye do it!" he gasped. "He 'ain't bellered!" The last in a chattering hope. Then we waited, while the King "sized us up." Apparently he thought well of us, for he only roared. Had he bellowed, it would have been time to clear the vicinity, for in that case we feared every inch of his mountainous

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body. After a period, still roaring softly, he went away through the sage-brush.

"Great Scott!" repeated Blubbins, in a swift breath; then there was silence for a time. McCormick stood, his back to the fire, stretched with the luxurious sense of a man living again, and looked thoughtfully off into the shadows. The tread of the King came faintly through the short mesquite woods.

It had been some months since the bull was last seen in the neighborhood, and we, whom he had once taught to go about with weapons at half-rest and a wary eye on the landscape, began to take cheer in the belief that he had made his home on some distant range. To have him turn up then in this unexpected way was depressing.

Nobody cared to say he owned him, as to do so would immediately bring the owner to law, in response to an endless list of damage claims, while his brands had become too obscured by the scars of combats to show where he belonged. Without question, he was the wickedest bull in the whole brown country. McCormick had on one or two occasions set out to kill him, but somehow lost his good intentions. Most persons were timid over the matter when it came

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to looking Spartacus in the eye. He was so heavy and massive that bullets might simply wound him, leaving him enraged, in which event few of us would care to be on the same acre of ground with him. The King's horns alone—monstrous affairs which he wore with pride—told of a long history of battles, being yellow and cracked and chipped near the tips. His great, hairy face, battered and scar-marked, spoke of a life of wickedness and crime. He fought his way from range to range, and when the opportunity came made the agitation of a stampede his delight.

We — the three of us — had been for some days on a hard ride into the north, and were nearing home again, with that sensation of peace and restfulness which comes to cattlemen after a season of vicious work. We were calculating upon lying around for a spell, allowing ourselves to be disturbed only in case of fire or flood. But this sudden appearance of Spartacus left us in a fever. It was surprising, the sense of deep uneasiness which the presence of the bull could put in a man's breast. Not necessary at all that he should be at one's heels; anywhere in the same general locality was enough.

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On this occasion McCormick the giant was most affected. He turned presently, breathing with closed teeth, and swung a glittering weapon into view.

"Fellers," said he, "if ever that bull and I meet ag'in, one or t'other of us dies!"

"A remark I've heard many times before," said Blubbins, dryly, between whiffs. "Ye couldn't 'a' hed a better chance than jis' now."

"Ye don't say!" growled the giant. "He wuzn't comin' fer me, wuz he? I reck'n nobody wants to shoot him in cold blood."

"A mighty old saw, too," retorted the other, easily. "But say?"

"Wull?"

"I wuz thinkin' of somethin'. S'pose he meets the Ginerel?"

The remark, carelessly made, threw us at once into a state of deep thoughtfulness.

"The General" had come to us some weeks before, with mud on his short, straight horns and cactus needles in his beard. From somewhere in the sweeps of the plain he had come, sidling not timidly, but with the confidence of a person approaching his own house. Though all visible evidence pointed to his being lost, the fact, if he was conscious of it, gave him no

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concern. He was an exceedingly serious-minded goat, to whom the permanent loss of his bearings was a circumstance too trifling for attention.

We might have been glad at his arrival had it not been for the ill-mannered way in which he "put up" at the ranch. He did so exactly as though he owned the place, ignoring the authority of every one, even to Foreman Joe, who viewed him with a suspicious eye from behind a corner of the stable, and was forced to flee to the loft for safety. Did any of us but regard the General evilly, he would divine it on the instant, and come for the particular culprit with the speed of a comet. As a consequence we were continually dodging and leaping from his path, until Joe declared that our agility exceeded anything he had ever seen us previously display, even on the liveliest round-up. For that same reason, and the further one that the animal was a decided novelty in the neighborhood, we suffered him to remain, knowing, too, that there would be no particular discomfort in his presence so long as we behaved ourselves and allowed him to "run" the ranch. We began then to watch for his approval before venturing on any important

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moves, and it often became a matter of rivalry between us as to who could cross the vacant ground between the house and corrals with the least show of concern, the General standing meanwhile in the open, his gaze directed quizzically toward us, while he chewed placidly a bit of broken stirrup-leather or a decomposed saddle-girth.

It was not this characteristic of the goat, however, which brought him at the present moment so strikingly to our mind, but rather the idea, with which he seemed to have been born, of having absolute right of way over all living objects, regardless of proportions. Since the hour of his arrival he had conducted himself on this principle; but now from out of the blue north there had come a famed gladiator, who, if their paths met and there was any show of officiousness, would demolish him, and the sound of whose voice alone might be expected to make him tremble. But therein we knew lay the General's stupidity. He had not the intelligence to tremble at anything, and we knew that he would regard this monarch of the prairies as an insect which the whiff of his breath would cause to fade into the horizon. And when the King refused to "fade," and

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returned his indifference, there would be trouble, which, as a matter of course, could only mean the ending of the General.

Our sympathy then went out to the smaller animal, McCormick especially, who had learned to hate him as one hates a mischievous brother, regarding his peril in a serious light. For Spartacus *had* headed toward the ranch. It worried the giant somewhat, and when morning came I knew that he had slept uneasily through the night.

We struck the trail early, and rode with speed, intending to reach the ranch before noon. The woods stood thinner and thinner as we advanced, dwindling finally into a scattering growth which told us the prairie was at hand. Toward the close of the morning we entered the broad sweep of rolling plain, on the far side of which lay the ranch-houses, with the knowledge that Spartacus had gone before us. For occasionally in a soft spot of the trail we had observed the mark of his great hoof, and McCormick, leaning above it, had said, sullenly,

“The King.”

It wasn't long, either, before we overtook him, between two slopes, less than three miles

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from the ranch buildings, toward which he was edging idly.

McCormick at once halted us, and said, with earnestness:

"Fellers, this is a serious matter. Somebody must hold him back while somebody else goes and warns the Ginerel."

"Easy enough in part," asserted Blubbins, with a glance at the King's magnificent horns. "I'll agree to 'ten' to the goat; and, say"—bending with some impatience toward McCormick—"I s'pose ye're willin' to do the holdin' back?"

The words stung the giant. He was in the exact mood to take them as a direct affront. He looked savagely at Blubbins, and from him to Spartacus, and his mind seemed made up to do something.

"Without a doubt," he said simply, and dismounted.

His next move was to unbuckle the picket rope and pin from his saddle, his fingers working with vicious swiftness. His six-shooter then he slipped into the saddle-bags, and passed the bridle of his mount to Blubbins, whose word of restraint sank at once in his throat.

"Close up—you!" thundered the giant. "I

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want no interference, and I'll *hev* none!" with a jerk of his fist toward the King. "Me and that animal hev been on ill terms for some time, and it behooves us to settle our account square. I'll tackle him alone or not at all, and if ye watch close ye'll see him roped out with less trouble 'n a lame plug."

He was clearly at ill temper; and when the giant reached that state no one was in the habit of venturing advice, especially when, as in this case, his anger overbalanced all human judgment. His idea was to lasso the King, drive the picket-pin at the rope's other end into the earth with his heel, and, if possible, get safely beyond the limit of the lariat. Instantaneous work—but that was his idea. His state of mind, too, was such as to leave him with a reckless desire to make the exploit as hazardous as possible. To show his contempt for the bull, he deliberately walked in a half-circle round him, halting at the top of the slope beyond—a useless movement, which left him facing, unmounted and unarmed, the wickedest pair of horns in the Brazos Valley. Spartacus for the moment was tranquil, but the buzzing of a fly was enough to turn the tide of his temper.

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The giant curved his long body into position for the cast, and we watched him, breathless. The same instant, it seemed, the loop went spinning through the air, and I heard a groan from Blubbins as we saw that he had not calculated for the slope of the land. The lariat had struck the King below the eyes.

Immediately he drooped his head and roared in sudden anger at the giant, who squared himself for the leap of his life. The moment was one of unutterable suspense. Spartacus roared again, and the cowboy, squatting with his hands on his thighs, awaited the lunge. Could he but dodge the first sweep of the horns, there would be hope of reaching his bronco. The King was on the very point of rushing, when his eye caught another object and he hesitated. This object was nothing more nor less than a solemn-looking head, with two straight horns and a wagging beard, which bobbed at this juncture over the summit of the knoll.

The General was in a thoughtful mood, as usual, and chewed obliviously the tough end of a weed, while his head was cocked wisely against the breeze. On the brow of the knoll, however, he seemed to become conscious that something of interest was taking place. The

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plain and the things upon it he regarded critically from the corner of his eye. His manner was serious, like that of a new overseer. His beard rose and fell reflectively, until he was given the expression of a sage.

We looked at the King. As said before, he had hesitated, and was gazing with curiosity at this small thing which had come so unceremoniously upon his vision. It was not unlikely that he had never seen a goat before. Though he had roamed every mile of the grasslands, from the Brazos to the Guadeloupe ranges, it was probable that a creature of this kind had never before crossed his path. Again he started up the slant, and again he came to a halt, looking in astonishment at the beast before him. The General, on the summit of the knoll, tilted his head at a new angle and looked ever so wise. Spartacus roared softly, switching his tail, and McCormick suddenly found himself an outside party to an embarrassing piece of business. Some distance away he assumed a respectful attitude, with his chin in his hands. Spartacus roared again, sullenly. Perhaps it was the *beard* that puzzled him so.

Then he advanced slowly, bellowing. His head swung lower in the dust, and his great

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hoof at intervals pawed the trail, lifting the earth in thick clouds, which showered on his back, covering the red and white spots. Whatever this thing was—this beast with a beard—he would annihilate it. Suddenly the General stood on his rear feet, bleating, like a young bully unable longer to restrain himself. Then he waltzed off at an angle, and, doubling sharply from a new quarter, came plump against the big brute's side with the force of a battering-ram. We saw the King stagger, and heard immediately his deep bellow of rage, then the battle was on with a swiftness that seemed to take the power of motion from us. A gasp from the giant, a cry from Blubbins and myself, and we were rigid with interest.

The General approached his adversary at angles and from all sides. In a manner rapid and ingenious he evaded the rushes of the King, who charged him repeatedly, bellowing and sweeping up the earth in his frenzy. A single thrust of the horns would end the business, but the little beast seemed always in a safe place. He wheeled and dodged in innumerable circles and squares, calculating his time to the second, and at intervals went in and established

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his forehead in the enemy's flank. The sound, when he did this, was like a blow on an empty barrel. And the bull would bellow again furiously, and it would seem as if they fought in an ash-heap, so thick was the dust, which rose in heavy, rolling banks, choking the air like a fog, until we could see but dimly the combatants, catching faintly the red gleam of the King's eyes. The General seemed everywhere in the commotion, wheeling and dodging and leaping away in a manner so rapid as to be bewildering, and when he landed on the King the rebound was as though he were an object of India-rubber. He feinted and foiled and countered with the certainty of one following a planned line of battle. There were generalship and science on his side, and lumbering overconfidence on the part of the bull, who, finding his great strength of so little importance, became disturbed in mind, and in consequence awkward. His lunges were furious but ill timed, and the General dodged in a manner so amazingly scientific as to fill us with wonder. Again and again would the bull sweep at him, bellowing, only to swing into space, and in the same instant feel the weight of his enemy against his ribs. These repeated

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bumps were as violent as the blows of a sledge. They began to tell upon him. Their unceasing regularity became monotonous. His horns raked the earth in a fury, but with less decisiveness. Unable to inspire terror into his antagonist, it enraged him so that his rushes came blindly. The General gave no sign of weakening. In this tempest of war he was as fresh and unruffled as when enjoying a frolic with the calves at dawn. He grew zealously aggressive, lest his share of the excitement should lag. Spartacus finally grew tired. His body swayed uncertainly through the dust-clouds, and occasionally we glimpsed the end of his steaming red tongue. In desperation, however, he waged the combat, until presently the General took his persistence as a personal irritation, and, doubling into a ball, hurtled himself with the velocity of a meteor against the King's stomach. The bellow of the bull was changed to a grunt as this happened, but he whirled heroically in a world of white dust, which hid for the moment the motions of the conflict. From out of the tumult there came the sound of a succession of thumps, rapid and regular, and a pair of immense horns and a massive dust-covered body emerged into the

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clear air and swung at a jaded gait over the plain.

We looked after him until the tallest hair of his back had dropped behind a knoll, and in the silence of the prairie we were left to contemplate one another. As the dust of conflict lifted, the General could be seen inspecting the vegetation along the slope.

We looked at him stupidly.

“Wow!” said Blubbins, after a period, with something like awe in his voice.


The giant mopped his brow.

“And sech a *Gineral!*” said he. “Re’llly—I hed no idee!”

II

“DOMINOES”

The Story of His Lively “Fourth”

HE Fourth of July had come, and its afternoon was already half gone, when Dominoes strode out of the living-house and, leaning his elbows on the fence, began mending a spur.

Presently Clem Hyde rode by.

“Hullo, Clem!” shouted Dominoes.

“Howdy, Dominoes?” replied the rider.

The mounted cowboy was about to pass on, but at the salutation he seemed to change his mind, and, turning his bronco, rode up to the fence.

“You’re lookin’ blue,” he ventured, cheerfully.

“Think so?” returned the other. He was young and tall, with a boyish face which the sun and wind had left dusky. He wore an ivory

“DOMINOES”

domino on his chain, and another in the girdle of his hat. Fancy does lots of things to bring us comfort, and the cowboy enjoyed showing his fondness for dominoes in this way.

“Wull, I should say!” retorted Clem. “What’s ailin’ you, anyhow?” He belonged on the Double “L” ranch, twenty miles to the west.

Dominoes tilted the spur in his hand idly, causing its steel plate to glitter in the sun.

“I’ll tell you, Clem,” he said: “it’s too mighty quiet to suit me. You remember what a time we had last Fourth? Nothin’ but rockets and noise the whole night long, and this year there ain’t going’ to be any noise, nor rockets, neither. Simply nothin’.”

He paused and sent a wandering glance about him—over corn-fields of yellow and green, and slopes and levels of gray prairie specked with cattle. Everything seemed to be asleep.

“You know, last year,” he went on, “we tried to outdo the Ferguson boys, me and my pards here, but we didn’t. They made a little more noise, and sent up consider’ble more Roman candles than we did, so this time we felt like givin’ them another ‘go.’ But Joe Talbot said, seein’ as we were all kinder short of funds,

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we'd better not. Said he'd fix it so's neither ranch would make any display, and he did. Yesterday he rode over to Ferguson's and saw Pete Bailey, one of their boys, and Pete agreed to it all—said *they* wouldn't buy any fireworks, neither, and so it's all fixed, and we're not goin' to have any fun at all—no, we ain't." And Dominoes gazed mournfully off across the plain in the direction of the rival ranch.

When his glance returned to his friend he saw that Clem's face showed signs of astonishing interest for a neutral party. The mounted man had suddenly straightened up, stiffening his feet in the stirrups.

"Did Pete Bailey say that?" he demanded, with an energy that bewildered Dominoes.

"Certainly; and why?"

"'Cause, if he did, he's foolin' you. I was in Cinnamon yesterday, and I *saw* him buyin' fireworks."

"No!"

"I'm tellin' you yes! I saw him buyin' right and left, and fillin' his saddle-bags to runnin' over!"

Dominoes took his hat by the rim, thrust it higher on his forehead, and stared in utter amazement at the speaker.

“DOMINOES”

“You—you’re sure it was Pete?” he stammered, finally.

“Sure of it! Of course I am. Don’t you s’pose I *know* him?”

Dominoes tempered his teeth.

“Yes,” he said, thickly, “but—you see—I didn’t think Pete— Say, Clem!” He bit the sentence off with sudden fierceness. “You’ve been in town to-day?”

“Yes; no more’n three hours ago.”

“And the stores—they ain’t closed?”

“No. Leastwise ‘Uncle’ Andy’s ain’t. Mighty small patriotism in *him* when it comes to dollars. Oh, I say, goin’ over?”

Dominoes had finished repairing the spur, and he now lifted his boot and buckled the steel to his heel.

“As quick as I can get there,” he said. “Good-bye.”

With a friendly motion of his hand he turned and strode off toward the stables, leaving Clem to proceed on his way, after watching him till he had passed under the sheds.

A few minutes later Dominoes rode out of the stable-yards and swung over the plain at a gallop. Following the road to Cinnamon, he sped

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onward at a rattling, vigorous pace, and counted his money as he went.

From the lining of his jacket he drew a little deerskin bag, and, pouring some coins into his palm, calmly numbered them as he galloped.

"Five, seven, ten, twelve," he counted, handling the pieces with amazing ease for one travelling at so great a rate. "Quite enough, I guess."

His eyes shone with a joyous light as he restored the silver to its pouch. It was all the money he had, but the pride of his ranch was at stake. He told himself this over and over, and it caused his bosom to swell and his blood to tingle. There would come a chill to his ardor, however, when he thought of the deceitfulness of his neighbor.

"Pete, Pete," he muttered, "I wouldn't have believed it; but as long as you did the trick—why"—he finished bitterly—"I'll have to surprise you in it!"

For a dozen miles he galloped on, and sundown had come when he rode into the main street of Cinnamon and tied his bronco in front of Uncle Andy's store.

The old shopkeeper greeted him with much warmth, and proceeded to show him through his

“DOMINOES”

establishment. There were fireworks there in great variety. Though the stock was by no means as bulky as it had been, there was still enough to plentifully satisfy Dominoes' wants.

The cowboy supplied himself, for the most, with Roman candles, buying several dozens of the largest ones. Tearing the bundles open in order to crowd more together, he stood them upright in his saddle-bags, until one of the two pockets was packed to its fullest. In the other section he then stored a mighty assortment of torpedoes, crackers, and rockets.

It was after dark when he again mounted and, with his store of treasures buckled safely to the saddle behind, started for the ranch. He spurred now as briskly as he had come, for there was some doubt in his mind whether he could reach home before the display of Ferguson's was begun. He wanted to be on hand to begin just when they did. When they fired their first rocket, he wanted to have one ready to sail up toward the skies abreast of it. The thought of not being able to do this caused him to increase his pace; then his mind turned to Pete and his faithlessness, and before he knew it he was flying over the plain at a furious gallop. He had once guided Pete Bailey out of a

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labyrinth of cañons, and had once helped him brand a drove of wild and vicious steers. And now to have him act in this way!

"Drat him for a miser'ble traitor!" he growled as he travelled on. "I'll show him!"

The gray, dusty road stretched dimly before him, but he followed it swiftly in the light of the stars. Presently the moon rose over a distant knoll and helped to light up his way. It also lit up the prairie for many miles, and Dominoes, with the quickness of one trained to know his surroundings, looked about him.

He was just crossing the old Chisolm trail, which he knew to be eight miles from home. Straining his gaze across the moonlit levels, he could barely see the glimmering lights of the ranch. The Ferguson place lay fifteen miles beyond, and was hidden by a line of low hills which zigzagged over the plain between the ranches.

Dominoes looked southward. There, had it been daylight, he could have seen for thirty miles. The wide, furrowed trail ran in a straight line across a vast stretch of level prairie, and, following it with his glance far beyond the point where it became too dim to be visible, he saw a moving light.

“DOMINOES”

“Emigrants,” he thought, and was about to ride on, when he suddenly pulled hard on his reins and listened. A sound, whose meaning he knew well, had caught his quick ear. From far to the north there came a low, dull rumble, as if some procession of heavy objects was bowling over the earth. At first a soft but sullen jar, it steadily swelled in volume, growing mightier as its cause came nearer. He knew it instantly—the muffled, sodden roar of a stampede!

“Howlin’ Zebulon!” he gasped. “They’re followin’ the trail!”

His eye turned northward, and soon he beheld the bulky, black mass as it swept over the plain like some mighty billow. It was not a very large herd, but quite enough to spread terror in its path. Dominoes saw that they were clinging to the trail, and, plying his spurs, dashed straight ahead for several hundred yards. Then he whirled, and his glance again swerved to the south.

“God save the emigrants!” he cried; then, facing the peril, he could only look and listen in anguish. That dull roar had now swollen to a thunderous thud, and already could he see the moonlight glinting on clashing horns.

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Another thought then occurred to Dominoes. The emigrants' wagon was more than two miles away; but no matter how far it might be, it was *on* the trail. The cattle must be driven from their course. No human power could stop them, but there was a chance—one in a hundred—of frightening them to the right or left.

Dominoes felt the wind on his cheek, and while he struck a match on his leggings his fingers clutched a number of the candles at his side. A moment later he was galloping back toward the trail, flinging the small candles in all directions. The prairie was ablaze in an instant, and as he wheeled and rode parallel with the trail the fire followed him. Then came a period of confusion. With mad swiftness he lit the fuses, one with another, and so thickly did he fling them about that both he and his bronco became hidden in the sparks and smoke. Spluttering, spewing, and popping, the explosives leaped here and there like dancing serpents, while they belched their streams of fire, and still, like some night fiend, he rode on, steering ever to the left and scattering flame in his path. His face was grimy with burnt powder, his eyebrows were scorched,

“DOMINOES”

and his blackened fingers were smarting from burns. But the travellers ahead were helpless, and he knew it. On one side rushing cattle, and on the other both cattle and fire, they could only hold to the trail.

Dominoes saw this, and forged desperately onward. For nearly a mile he rode, and when he stopped there was a string of fire beside the trail behind him. His rest was brief, however. The thundering herd swept down upon him a minute afterward, though now divided in half by the flames. The uproar was tremendous. Dominoes found himself engulfed in a haze of sparks and smoke, mingled with dust from the heels of bulls. Half blinded, he rode diagonally for the trail. Though most of the drove had been flanked out of the way, there were several hundred hugging the trail from the west, and the cowboy rode abreast of them. Through the rifts of dust he made out the leaders. Two gigantic bulls were in advance, bellowing and blowing, with dust banking up from their hoofs and steam vaporizing from their hides. He rode hard and came even with the nearest one. His leg swung stiffly in the stirrup, and he felt his knee squeezed tight between his pony's side and the warm, wet hide of the bull. One hand then

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sought the bag at his hip, and there followed a report like the bursting of a bomb. He had crashed his heaviest torpedo on the brute's broad withers!

It was followed by another and another, as swiftly as he could lift and lower his arm. The noise deafened him, black powder smoke swept up in his face, and burnt fragments bit his flesh, but he held on viciously. His breath came hot and husky, and he was weakening, but, leaning over, he hung desperately to the chase, crowding always to the west as he plied his paper bombs. It was a singular bombardment.

For half a mile the bull and the bronco travelled abreast at the head of the tumult, the cowboy all the while leaning farther and farther over, and pressing harder and harder the brute's heaving side till, at last, there came a change. The smell of so much powder, and the din of so many explosions about his ears, became more than the bull could endure, and he suddenly swayed at a gentle angle from the trail. The bull on the other side of him swayed as well, the cattle just behind followed, others followed them, and, plunging and bellowing, they still moved together. Dominoes wheeled

“DOMINOES”

short to the left, and his pony quivered to a stand as the last of the herd hammered past them. It was time. Through banks of fine earth the cowboy strained his weakened eyes. The lantern on the emigrants' wagon swung scarcely a hundred yards away.

He heard the wheels of the vehicle moving off safely, and the travellers talking excitedly to one another, but he did not think of overtaking them and explaining how they had been saved.

For some moments he simply eased himself in the stirrups and rested; then, as the fire behind him blew nearer, he rode farther out on the safe side of the trail to cool off. Dismounting there, he stripped the saddle from his pony that he might breathe and rest in comfort, and stretched his own tired body upon the plain. The burns on his hands and face he regarded as too slight to notice, and besides, he was thinking of something else—something which really grieved him.

When he got into the saddle, half an hour afterward, and again rode ranchward, he still thought of this deplorable thing, and once in a while his fingers sank into the bag behind him, where they clutched a few little bundles

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of firecrackers—all that was left of his valued horde. It left him dolefully depressed.

“It’s a miser’ble shame,” he grumbled, bitterly, “but I had to use ’em—I just *had* to.” Then, with his gaze toward the Ferguson ranch, “I s’pose they’ll begin d’reckly, drat ’em!”

But the boys on the Ferguson place did not begin. At least they had not done so when Dominoes rode into the stable-yards at his home.

He could not understand it. After bathing his burns and having his supper he came out, and sitting alone on the wood-pile, looked long and anxiously in the direction of the Fergusons’. Nothing unusual, however, seemed to be happening over there, and after a while Dominoes, very much puzzled, shuffled into the house and went to his bed.

It was about an hour after sunup the next morning, and he was leaning again over the front fence, when Pete Bailey came in view trotting his yellow pony over the prairie.

Dominoes allowed him the first remark. Pete rode close up to the fence, and after greeting him breezily, began to fidget in his saddle. Dominoes wondered. When Pete

“DOMINOES”

Bailey showed awkwardness on a horse something must be wrong.

“Where’s Joe?” asked the man from Ferguson’s.

“Busy.”

“Yes? Wull, say, Dom, I want to tell you somethin’. I—you see—I want to kinder do the apology. You see, I didn’t trust you, Dom, and I’m ashamed of it. No, I didn’t trust you at all. Thought you were foolin’ about not gettin’ any fireworks, and that you intended a sort of s’prise party on us. And so I jest rode over to Cinnamon and laid in a supply of combustibles. I wasn’t goin’ to make a showin’ first, you know, but was jest goin’ to be ready in case you started the ball. And so—wull, I done that, and, as I said afore, I’m ashamed of it.”


Dominoes whistled.

“Oh, you needn’t be,” he said, carelessly.
“I done the same thing.”

III

THE SHERIFF OF GINGERBREAD GAP

His "Official Christmas"

T may seem odd to you that a boy of nineteen should be selected as guardian of the peace in a community of bearded men, but that is exactly what happened at Gingerbread's last municipal election. Moreover, it was a unanimous sentiment that did it, and some weeks had elapsed after Jason was installed before there arose a discordant note.

"Don't take it that I'm complainin'," observed Mr. Hank Driscoll, Mayor of the camp, and also proprietor of the "Gayhart Lode," to the customary group of his fellow-citizens assembled for the evening in front of the cabin grocery—"I say don't take it I'm dissatisfied at all with the service he's givin' us, but I *must* say that I'm afeard he'll weaken. Not very

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soon, p'r'aps, and maybe never, if the p'tic'lar occasion don't happen to rise, but I *must* say that it's my opinion he'll drop some of his sand some day. He's so young and tender, you know." And the Mayor, hardly expecting a response, squinted thoughtfully at the horizon.

Whereupon Mr. Pete Larkin, the grocery-man, came out of the store with a tobacco-box, on which he very nicely edged himself into the panorama.

"Possibly young, but by no means tender," said he. "Did he weaken much when the stage was overhauled last month? Sho'd say he didn't. He went right after the thieves, an' tho' one of 'em was an ole acquaintance of his, he nailed him jest the same, an' fetched him right in to jestice."

"Aw—I ain't lookin' at it exactly that way," said the Mayor, hastily. "I'm thinkin' of somethin' kinder different from that, which I can't just describe. For instance, if one of us old-timers here should happen to need the attention of a sheriff, and weren't disposed to receive him peaceably, don't you think there'd be a time for hesitation and a little droppin' of courage?"

Mr. Larkin thought not. If necessary, he

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said, Jason had the power to appoint any number of deputies to assist him in a matter of that kind, which flattened the Mayor's argument so effectually that he subsided, convinced still that he had not made clear what he meant.

Perhaps we can gather from him, however, that there was floating in the air of Gingerbread a doubt as to the young sheriff's moral strength in the case of certain unlooked-for events, though so far he himself had received no inkling of this doubt, and certainly had given no cause for its existence. He knew that he had been elected because everybody liked him, and in consequence followed his duty as carefully as he had sworn to follow it, reverencing deeply his oath of office.

Nevertheless, the doubt continued to grow and flourish, until he settled it the night of the trouble between Mose Darcy and Jake Pomeroy, both men of standing in Gingerbread. They quarrelled, and Darcy received a slight wound in the arm. The sheriff required no deputies to assist him, but took each of the belligerents by the shoulder and quietly marched them to the little log jail at the upper end

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of town. It cost him an effort, though, as he afterward told old Burbank, the trapper from Deer Creek.

"They were both my friends," he said, "and I was tremblin' all the time for fear they'd take offence, but we talked friendly all the way to the jail."

Poor Jason! It had been a sorer trial than he himself cared to admit. He had felt very much like waiving the arrest and laughing the quarrel aside, but the duty of a sheriff was too glaring. Yet they were citizens of such prominence! It had almost taken away his breath to arrest them, and had people only known it, he was white with anxiety during the tramp jailward, and thought the matter over long and carefully after bolting the door on his prisoners.

In the silence of his quarters that evening he still lingered in doubt.

"What 'll folks say? What 'll they think of it?" he wondered.

As for Mayor Driscoll, he thought well of it.

"A brash youngster, after all," said he to himself. "Another performance like that, and I'll vow we couldn't have a better sheriff."

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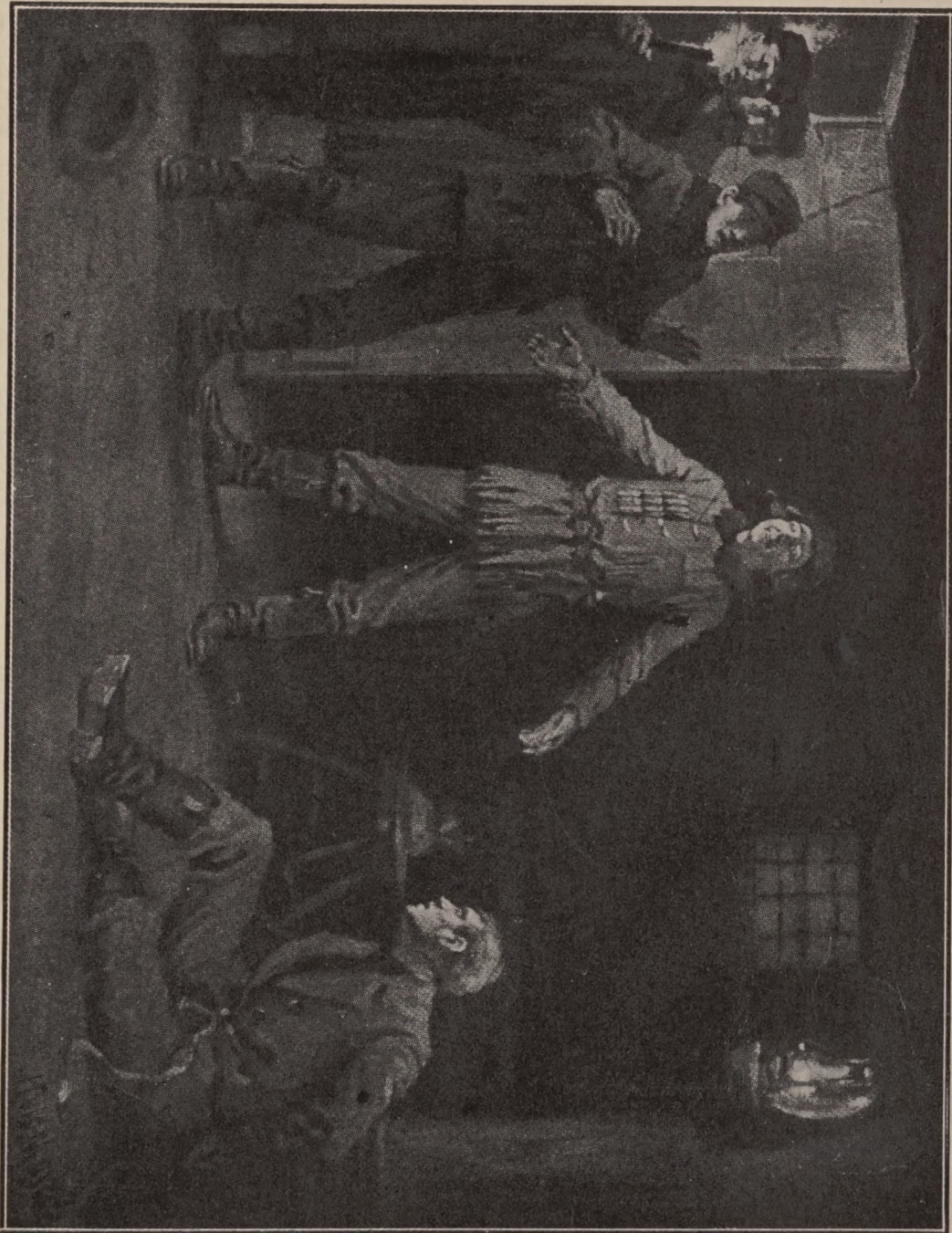
Of the general effect, however, Jason had not time to judge before he was called on a mission of greater importance.

It happened that the night after this was Christmas eve, and he lay awake, wondering in what pleasant manner he might spend the next day. He remembered that Christmas Day used to be to him a period of joyousness, but in late years it had not seemed such a happy institution. For the first time he thought Gingerbread a desolate community. Certainly it was no place to spend a holiday, so he would ride over the mountains on the morrow and visit Brother Bob, who hunted for a living in the woods above Cottrel's Gulch.

In this way he mused, until there came a great hammering at his cabin door, and he heard the tread of numerous hoofs and boots outside. Wondering, he stole to the entrance, swung it open, and at once faced a crowd of furious men.

A motley score they numbered, and some were mounted. Mr. Montgomery, president of the Miners' Savings-Bank, rode at their head in his shirt-sleeves.

"We want you, youngster!" he cried, brandishing a torch frantically above the crowd.



THEY CONFRONTED TWO MEN, ONE OF WHOM WAS BOUND TO A POST

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"We've heard you could follow a trail in the dark."

"An' thet he kin, I swan!" hooted a deep, grinding voice from over to the left somewhere, and old Burbank came elbowing his way forward. There followed a fierce shout of affirmation, which finally died low enough to enable Jason to get hold of the trouble. The savings-bank had been "looted." At least half of its store of slowly earned gold-dust had been carried away, presumably in a big bag, and naturally it was the bearer of this bag who was so earnestly wanted.

The sheriff made no complaint. This was the dawning of his Christmas; but what of it? He must work. His office was such that he must expect to work at all times.

Accordingly, when the crowd moved away he moved before it, and, striking the trail over by the mouth of the gap, followed it up through the valley. The air was chilly and crisp, and a thin covering of snow lay upon the earth, fallen, no doubt, while the robber was in the bank, for it was certain he would not have willingly risked his trail on such a night. However, with no light save that of the stars and a pine torch, it was difficult for the keenest

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eyes to hold to the track. Yet Jason's progress was steady. It even satisfied Mr. Montgomery, who rode close behind him, followed by one-half the population of Gingerbread—his trusting depositors!

The banker showed wondrous patience. At first he had grumbled continually, but the movements of the sheriff had amazed him into silence. Jason advanced with regular step, his gaze always downward. At times he walked upright, and at times he stooped to examine more closely a detail in the snow.

Presently, after having gone a mile or so, he became more interested in one of the footprints than he had been in any of the others. It seemed to be clearer cut, and told him more. Its full measurement stood out bolder, and he noticed that the mark of the heel was very broad, and, though shallow on one side, was deep on the other. The boy staggered suddenly as though shot. Mr. Montgomery, looking ahead, supposed he had stumbled, and cried for him to take his time. The sheriff rushed on to the next footprint, and—yes, there was the same characteristic in the heel-mark—an unusual breadth, with the impression dimmest on the outer edge. Both boots, then, were worn

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the same. Singular he had not noticed this before. With head lowered and lips clinched, he strode on. His torch hung low over the trail, which he inspected now with a new depth of interest. But one man in all that neighborhood wore his boot-heels down in such a manner, and that was *Brother Bob*. At first he could not credit it, but as the heel-prints repeated themselves he saw there was no variation in them, which of necessity strengthened his fears.

For an instant the flash of amazement staggered him. He was stupefied. After that he moved dizzily on over the trail, wondering what best to do. The line of grumbling miners maintained their patient pace, and the boy fancied they were trying to hurry him. Should he forget his oath of office and throw them off the trail? He wanted them to crowd him, but they would not. Deliberately, with almost a kindly feeling, they seemed to follow; and he remembered, too, that they were plundered men.

The boy shuffled slowly on over the snow. There was a certain dogged yet defiant motion to his steps, and straining within him a rancorous sense of indecision. Deeper than this dwelt a solemn appreciation of his oath. A vow to

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perform faithfully the duties of a sheriff he had taken honestly, in the presence of honest men, and this in his imagination now stood out as a thing of awful import. Being younger than most persons, it doubtless seemed mightier to him than it would have to others. Anyhow, its weight grew heavier and heavier, until, like a thing of lead, it hung darkly at one end of the question in his mind. Suppose he were to break his oath? Suppose he were to discard the track he was following and take up another? It could be easily done. The trail was so dim in spots that he alone might discern it, and the line of growling men that zigzagged in his wake would gladly turn in a new direction. But in case he did this, what dread calamity might befall him as a consequence? What unseen force might come out of the mist and smite him heavily?

The boy moved slowly along over the snow. Two miles farther. His look now was not always down, but occasionally wandered from side to side. At times he walked several yards without heeding the trail, and at times halted on his knees in the snow to puzzle over something already plain to him. This gave him time while his feelings raged. First he would

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think of the moving men behind, and their diabolical patience, and then of the man *ahead*. Next he would look at the trail—the communicating line between the one and the other, and think of himself chosen to interpret it. And this was Christmas morn!

The sheriff lowered his torch and dragged its lighted end in the snow. Then he waited until his followers came up with him. Mr. Montgomery at once reached his side.

“Hullo, my boy!” he called, cheerfully. “Torch gone? Take mine.”

And the sheriff again moved off across the mountains. They must now be almost to the end of the trail, he thought. The robber, travelling only since the snow had fallen, could not be a great ways off. Three years before the sheriff would have cried. As it was, a furtive fretfulness soon took hold of him, and, peering warily about, he began to enfold in his fancy various distorted things. A boulder on his left or right he regarded as a part of that power which would swallow him in case he failed to heed his oath, while the sides of the cañons, rising from twilight into shadow, were to him like great, gray wings of might. He hated them. Indeed, he hated everything that was

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large and dark. Most of all he hated that long, irregular procession grumbling ever in his wake. Its persistency fretted him. It rose and fell and curved and crooked until its motions were mindful of some great creeping reptile. Its jagged lines, dimly woven into the night, were like the angles of a dragon. Two torches gleamed at the head of the column, and they were eyes. Hideous eyes. They kept steadily in his path, glowering at him. They pursued him always, and at times came closer, until they could hover near his heels, and there they hung and blazed and blazed.

The boy suddenly began to walk swiftly. With long, quick steps he moved in and out among the bowlders, for the trail to him was plain, and there was no need of lagging. When his followers came close he moved all the faster, until even those mounted wondered at the speed.

In this way a number of miles were quickly covered; and finally, after curving round the sides of several hills, the sheriff stood at the top of the path leading down into Cottrel's Gulch. With an elbow on a bowlder he stood there, looking down. The darkness about him was giving place to the pale gray of a

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mountain dawn. Below him, at the foot of the path, he could see a lonely log cabin. Its door was closed, but above the sod chimney a rift of smoke rose slowly through the mist of distance. And this was Christmas Day.

The youth turned suddenly and beckoned to the men who were following to come on. He then entered the path, and in a kind of blind frenzy strode swiftly down the side of the gorge. Soon he was at the rocky bottom, and the citizens of Gingerbread filed carefully down after him. Two bounds then carried him to the cabin door, upon which he began to beat savagely with clenched hands. Mr. Montgomery and all the miners listened.

"Who's there?" called a quick voice from within.

"The sheriff of Gingerbread!" thundered the boy.

To the surprise of every one, the door was at once opened, so suddenly as to cause the sheriff, whose weight was against it, to stumble over the threshold. Immediately he rose, to confront two men, one of whom was bound to a post, and whom he had never seen before. The other — a young fellow, with a round,

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freckled face—stood smiling in the centre of the room.


He was dressed in hunter's garb, and said, cordially, as he thrust out a hand:

“Hullo, Jason! Merry Christmas! Hardly expected ye so soon. Headed 'im off fer ye” — with a gesture toward the prisoner—“jest above here, on the ridge. I'd started to pay ye a visit, ye see, an' had got as fur as the outskirts o' your camp when I see 'im scootin' out o' the bank with a bag. He wuz hurryin', too, I tell ye, and giv' me no time to roust ye. So, as he goes one way, I goes another, an' by cuttin' back across the hills I fetches up ag'inst 'im right here by home. But ye showed up quick, didn't ye? Cracky, yes! Ye must 'a' follered *my* trail!”

IV

CAPTURED BY THE SIOUX

In the Camp of Screaming Horse

 THE Skyrocket Ranch was noted throughout southern Dakota in the earlier days for the fertility of its pasture range and the great herds of cattle that roamed over it, carrying on their quarters the well-known two-star brand that testified to their ownership.

When Jacob Hopkins first settled in one of the river-bottoms of the Dakota Territory his ranch was naturally invested with the name of its owner, which it kept until one Fourth of July, when young Frank Hopkins came home from a cattle-sale at Yankton, bringing with him several packages which he had taken pains to keep without the circle of the camp-fire on the preceding evening when

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the returning cowboys had gone into camp for the night.

After the sun had disappeared behind the hills to the westward of the ranch, and the stars had begun to peep out one by one from the summer sky, Frank proudly opened his closely guarded packages and exhibited to an eager group of cattlemen and Indian helpers a generous assortment of firecrackers, bombs, and rockets.

While the display was at its height, and the heavens were sprinkled with quickly vanishing red, blue, and orange colored stars, a tall figure, crowned with an imposing head-dress of feathers and wrapped in a gayly decorated blanket, strode into the group and approached the boy.

"How?" said the individual.

"How?" replied Frank, shaking the savage's hand. "Glad you came, chief; thought you'd forgotten my invitation. Sit down and see the fun."

The Indian grunted in acknowledgment of the welcome, and without further ceremony squatted on the ground and viewed the exhibition without an expression of satisfaction or astonishment beyond an occasional deep grunt when an unusually noisy bomb exploded

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or an extra-brilliant galaxy of stars burst in the sky.

Screaming Horse, the Sioux chief, lived with a small branch of his tribe in a few wretched tepees just beyond the range, coming with them every summer to the river to fish, and incidentally to help in the cattle round-up so as to obtain the wherewithal to purchase enough of the white man's fire-water to keep them in a state of happy oblivion for the following week. That is, the humble followers of Screaming Horse did the work under his scornful supervision; and after the chief had received the whole compensation in the name of his tribe, and had exchanged it for several suspicious-looking demijohns at the trader's store, he would return to his camp and graciously permit his subjects to enjoy his hospitality. When the revel came to an end, a straggling line of forlorn and demoralized-looking savages would creep back to the hills.

The masterpiece of Frank's collection, a monster rocket, had been reserved for the closing of the exhibition, and preparations were now made to insure a successful sending-up of the fiery projectile. When the boy approached, bearing the huge red, white, and blue rocket,

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the heretofore stoical chief could no longer conceal his curiosity and admiration. He strode to the place where it was being set up, and gazed covetously upon the gaudy object, even going so far as to pat it caressingly and grunt.

Frank thrust a lighted match under the gayly colored tube. A hissing stream of sparks shot downward, and with a terrifying scream and roar the rocket tore its way through the sky, leaving a burning trail behind it, and, mounting higher and higher and higher, at last burst with the noise of a cannon and showered the heavens with floating planets of every brilliant hue.

Screaming Horse was completely overcome. "Heap good!" he exclaimed, in tones of mingled awe and delight; "skyrocket heap good; plenty fire; plenty noise; Skyrocket Ranch plenty heap good!"

From that night the cowboys always called it Skyrocket Ranch, and the name soon fixed itself permanently upon it.

For several years after Frank's firework display fortune smiled on Jacob Hopkins. His cattle multiplied and his strong-box at the banker's grew steadily heavier. Then the tide turned.

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One winter continued with such severity and heavy falls of snow that the cattle could not scrape through the drifts to obtain the herbage beneath, and starved and froze by hundreds. Many of those that survived the winter died in the following spring of a disease consequent upon the privations and rigor of the previous months, and, now that the summer had come, the few remaining steers were in danger of being either killed or run off by the Sioux, who had gone on the war-path a few weeks before.

On this particular July morning Mr. Hopkins with ten of his cowboys was to go over the range, collecting all the cattle to be found and driving them within an enclosure near the ranch for their better security. The five remaining men, with Frank, now a stalwart youth of sixteen, were to remain and make preparations for receiving the animals when they were driven in.

The news that had reached the ranch on the day previous concerning the outbreak among the redskins was to the effect that, although it had taken place at a somewhat remote point of the territory, yet it was feared that a general understanding existed among the tribes,

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and the cattlemen were advised to adopt precautions for saving life and property. Fortunately Frank's mother and sisters were spending the summer in the Eastern States, so there was no anxiety to be experienced on their account; but a young cousin, a delicate-looking boy of twelve years, had come out to Dakota a few days before to rough it for a few months on his uncle's ranch in hopes of building up a naturally weak constitution, and Mr. Hopkins's parting injunction to Frank had been to look after and keep the lad Russell constantly by his side.

After a hard morning's work the men returned to the house for dinner, which being disposed of, they produced pipe and tobacco and proceeded to enjoy the remainder of the noon hour. Russell threw himself on a couch in one of the adjoining rooms, and when Frank went in to him a little later the tired boy was sleeping soundly, and looked so pitifully weak that he had not the heart to waken him.

"I guess I'll let him lie there till he wakes of his own accord," thought Frank. "No harm can come to him here, and it will be better for him than to be out in the broiling sun. Besides, we shall be working only a short dis-

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tance from the house, and I can ride back here every little while and look after him."

An hour later Frank galloped up to the ranch and, after hitching his horse, entered the house and made his way to the room where he had left the sleeping boy.

The bed was empty.

"I say, Russell!" he called, loudly, "where are you?"

No answer.

Before he could again cry out a pair of sinewy arms imprisoned him, a gag was thrust into his mouth, and the next moment the room swarmed with Indians, hideous in war-paint and feathers, among whom was our old acquaintance, Screaming Horse, under whose orders Frank's arms were securely bound, then he was hurried out of the house, mounted on his own horse, and led away in the direction of the river.

After they had been riding about an hour, Screaming Horse rode up to Frank's side and removed the gag, remarking, with equal brevity and directness,

"Make noise, get kill!"

Shortly after this they were joined by several other Indians having Russell with them,

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and Frank was rejoiced to see that he had not been harmed, although realizing that they were probably reserved for a fate in comparison with which speedy death would be merciful.

All that afternoon they rode rapidly across the prairie in a westerly direction, and about an hour after sundown reached a wide, running stream fringed with clumps of trees. Here the horses were picketed and supper partaken of, Frank's arms being unbound so that he might pick up the scanty portion tossed to him by the chief.

As the two captives sat side by side within the circle formed by the redskins, Frank said in an undertone to the frightened boy,

"Try to keep your pluck up, Russell, for these fellows don't intend to kill us now, at any rate, and a chance may come for us to get away."

A few minutes later the chief bound Frank's arms and legs, and left him lying on the ground beside the boy, whom he also secured in like manner.

For the next two hours the Indians sat in a circle a few yards away, smoking their pipes and addressing one another in their guttural

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tones, then they stretched themselves on the grass and slept.

"Russell?" whispered Frank.

"Yes."

"Turn over softly so that I can whisper in your ear—so; now, when I turn on my side, put your mouth down and chew the little strip of hide that my hands are bound with, but stop and pretend to be asleep if I draw them away."

Not a savage stirred as the frightened lad gnawed at the strong but slender cord, and never did sharp young teeth bite to better effect, for they were as the teeth of the mouse in the fable that gave freedom to the bound lion. In ten minutes Frank's hands were freed, but he was obliged to wait a little until the blood circulated, then he quickly cast off the fastenings on his feet and released his companion.

With wildly beating hearts the two prisoners crept noiselessly beyond the limits of the sleeping warriors, and stole out to where the horses were cropping the prairie grass. In the light of the newly risen moon Frank made out his own spirited animal near him, picketed close to the noble horse that the chief had ridden

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and which had evidently been stolen by the same dusky individual.

To free the two animals and lift Russell across the back of one, then to vault into his own saddle, was the work of an instant. Bidding the boy walk his horse beside him, Frank swung round and watched the camp of their sleeping enemies until it had faded out, and such a distance had been put between it and them that the danger of awakening their foes by the sound of galloping hoofs was past; then the horses were urged to their utmost speed, and kept at it until many miles had been covered. After that they gave the animals a breathing-spell, and again pushed on, taking the trail they had passed over a few hours before.

When the sun rose ahead of them, and lit up the great, level prairie that they had fled across, Frank pointed ahead, with a cry of joy, to the sight of a band of cowboys sweeping furiously over the trail toward them, and at their head a powerful figure mounted on a coal-black stallion, which, even at the distance of a mile, he knew too well to mistake.

Frank was almost a man, to be sure, but he was not too big to be clasped in his father's

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arms a few moments later, and to mingle his tears of joy with those of the hardy plainsman whose son and sister's child had been given back to him almost from the grave.

It appeared that the ranch-hands had thought little of Frank's absence until late in the afternoon, when their work was finished; then search was made for him, which led to the discovery of Indian signs about the house. The trail had been followed a short distance, but as night was coming on the men feared an ambush, so decided to return and seek Frank's father.

When they reached the ranch Mr. Hopkins and his herders were seen driving the collected cattle into the enclosure prepared for them. As soon as he was acquainted with the fearful tidings, he would have started at once in pursuit, but was restrained by the sensible advice of his men. It was pointed out that to follow the trail at night was an impossibility, and, although to wait for dawn was maddening, yet it was their only chance.

By the time that the first streaks of dawn were gilding the eastern sky a resolute body of men, skilled in Indian trickery and warfare, were spurring madly along the trail. The rest has been told.

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The reason that the savages did not fire the ranch is that they wished to escape unnoticed with their prisoners.

Several weeks later Screaming Horse and his braves were captured by the soldiers; but, instead of receiving the punishment they deserved, our kind-hearted government pardoned their many evil deeds and sent them to live on a reservation, where they were fed and cared for until the great Indian uprising under the celebrated savage Rain-in-the-Face, whose followers murdered the gallant General Custer and his noble Seventh Cavalry at the battle of the Little Big Horn on June 25, 1876.

V

A BRUSH WITH INDIANS

"The Bravest Boy on the Plains"

HE winter of 1870 had been an unfortunate one for Frank Mead. The bank in which he had deposited the money with which to pay off the mortgage on his farm had failed; the loan had been foreclosed, and the land that his father had tilled before him was to be given up to strangers.

"I tell you what, Nancy," said the dispirited farmer to his wife, "this is what I get for having had too much patriotism. When the war broke out my farm hadn't a cent of debt on it, but, after four years of going to ruin while I was away, I had to mortgage it in order to get it running again; then the money I saved to pay it off with was stolen from me, and — and — it seems as though everything's against me."

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“Don’t despair, Frank,” said his wife; “you did your duty, and I’m sure the Lord won’t desert us. He will help us out of our troubles in His own good way, dear, if we only trust Him.”

Here the kitchen door was flung open to admit a bright, manly lad of fifteen years, whose earnest gray eyes lit up with pleasure as they met his father’s look. Crossing the room to where he sat, he laid his hand upon his shoulder, while he said, proudly:

“Dad, you ought to have heard what was said about you this afternoon before the Board of Visitors at our school. When I was called to the platform to receive my diploma, one of the gentlemen spoke to Mr. Allison, our principal, asking him something about me; then he turned to me and said out loud, so that everybody heard him: ‘So you are the son of Captain Frank Mead? I’m glad to shake hands with you, my boy, for your father was one of the best and bravest officers in my regiment. Tell him that I shall give myself the pleasure of calling upon him this evening.’ I tell you, dad, it made me proud to have my father spoken of like that!”

The ex-officer’s face brightened.

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"It must have been Colonel Cruger," he said; "I have not seen him since our regiment was disbanded in Washington, five years ago. How glad I shall be to see him and talk over old times!"

Until late that night the two veterans sat together rehearsing the scenes in which they had figured, and mentioning softly the names of gallant comrades who had gone on before. During their talk the colonel learned of the misfortunes that had been experienced by his friend.

Suddenly turning to his host, he exclaimed:

"I say, Mead, why not join my party? I can offer you an agreeable position which your military experience qualifies you to fill, and the pay is sufficient to support your family comfortably. Come, think about it, and talk it over with your good wife, and let me have your answer in the morning. I shall be detained here for a week, so that if you decide upon joining the expedition you will have considerable time to make all arrangements."

A family council, which lasted well into the small hours of the morning, resulted in Mr. Mead deciding to go, and in Frank obtaining the desired consent to go with him. When he

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at last tumbled excitedly into bed he resolutely decided that he would not go to sleep, fearing that if he did the morning would prove it to be all a dream. Nature at last demanded its tribute, and the curly brown head was resting quietly upon the pillow when the sun climbed high enough to look into the window of his bedroom.

The following week was a busy one in the old homestead. Arrangements were made whereby Mrs. Mead was to spend the summer with a relative, and all the live-stock, with the exception of Frank's pony and his father's big black mare, were sold. It seemed to Frank that some disaster was certain to occur before the day set for their departure which would cause the enterprise to fall through, and it was not until the last tender good-byes had been said, the horses safely led on board, and the little post steamer steaming up the river from St. Louis that he felt the first symptoms of relief.

Ten days later the gang-plank was thrown on shore opposite the stockade known as Fort Thomson, which was garrisoned by a regiment of United States infantry and several companies of cavalry. Here Colonel Cruger found

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the remainder of his party awaiting him, and a few days sufficed to thoroughly organize the expedition. Major Montgomery, the commander of the post, informed the colonel that, although the Indians had been quiet for some time in the vicinity of the station, it would be unwise to place any dependence upon those to be met with on the journey, and advised him to conduct the survey strictly upon the lines that would be followed in a hostile country.

Early one morning six tent-covered wagons, known as "prairie-schooners," each drawn by four mules, left Fort Thomson under an escort of forty men and rolled in a westerly direction across the plain.

When a halt was made the following day it was figured that only twenty-five miles of the journey had been covered, so slow was the movement of the heavily laden wagons. Riding by the side of the guide hour after hour, Frank had been instructed in the rudiments of "Indian signs," and regaled with stories of hairbreadth escapes from the painted and feathered warriors of the plains.

A short time after breaking camp the next morning Frank was sent back with a message to the driver of the rear wagon. He carried

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out his instructions and started to return, when his pony picked up a stone in his shoe. Dismounting, he attempted to pry it out, but it was so firmly wedged that the last of the train had disappeared over a rise of ground just ahead before he succeeded in freeing the hoof; then, just as he was in the act of mounting, a scattering volley of rifle-shots and a series of blood-curdling yells rang out on the early morning air. To reason that the train was attacked by Indians was the thought of a moment. Why it was that he did not obey a natural impulse to throw himself into his saddle and spur furiously over the hill in an attempt to rejoin the wagons he could never tell. Perhaps the seeds of Indian warfare planted only a short time before by the old plainsman were already developing.

The crest of the ridge was covered with bushes, so that it was possible to creep among them and observe what was going on without betraying his presence. Leading the pony a short distance up the ascent, he quickly hitched the bridle-rein to a sapling; then, with wildly beating heart, he crept on his hands and knees until the summit was gained. Looking out through the foliage, Frank saw, about a quar-

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ter of a mile away, several hundred Indians galloping about the wagons, which were being rapidly formed into a square to encircle the unhitched mules and unmounted horses. The redskins continually swept around the barricade, discharging arrows at the men, who blazed away at them in return, only to see the wily savages disappear behind the sides of their scraggy mustangs, to which they clung by one leg and arm until out of rifle-shot, when they would swing themselves upright, adjust new arrows, and charge furiously down upon the train, to let slip their poisoned darts and to immediately screen themselves again.

After a time the Indians gave up this mode of attack and withdrew out of bullet range. From the number of the redskins and the comparative weakness of the exploring party, Frank reasoned that, even if the latter succeeded in holding off the Indians in the daylight, they would surely be overpowered during the night by the savages creeping upon them unawares. To reach the train was impossible, for the instant that he would dare to leave cover the hawk eyes of the red men would detect his presence, and they would swoop upon him before half the distance between his hid-

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ing-place and the wagons could be covered. He saw the Indians scatter into groups, surround the train at a distance, and dismount from their horses. They had probably determined to wait for the night to come, so that they might make their way over the grass and gain the wagons unobserved.

It was at this instant that a means of saving the train flashed through the boy's mind. The fort was twenty-five miles away, but his pony was fresh, and would carry him there in three or four hours. It was only nine o'clock, and if fortune favored him he could be at the stockade shortly after the dinner-hour. Before dark the cavalry could reach the spot where the explorers had been trapped. Frank knew that his father was nearly crazed over his absence, and he stifled a desire to make some signal to let him know that he was safe. Backing down the hill to where his pony was tethered, he flung himself across the saddle, drove his spurs into the sides of the spirited animal, and sped along the clearly defined trail that the wagons had made only a short time before. Soon he dashed by the place where the party had spent the preceding night. The fire over which their breakfast had been cooked was still

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smouldering, and around it several coyotes were snarling and fighting over the remnants of the meal. Not until he had put a dozen miles between him and his starting-point did Frank rein in the gallant little horse; then he removed the bit, unbuckled the girth, and rubbed down the panting sides with bunches of grass. Soon he was in the saddle again and speeding across the plain.

That afternoon, as the sentinel paced the elevated platform inside the stockade at Fort Thomson, his attention was attracted by something moving rapidly away out on the prairie, and which he soon made out to be a horse and rider coming toward the post. A few minutes later a foam-flecked pony with widely distended nostrils galloped through the postern-gate and stood with hanging head and convulsively working sides, while its boy rider dropped to the ground and reeled toward the major's quarters.

The sun's lower edge was kissing the top of the long prairie grass out on the western horizon, and the long shadows were creeping stealthily across the plain—creeping as softly as the merciless redskins proposed to creep

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upon the surveying-party after nightfall. Within the barrier of the wagons a council was being held, and the guide was speaking:

“Thar’s no use a-denyin’ of it, Curnel; we’re in er tight fix, an’ thar’s only one thing fer ter do ef we are ter make a try fer our scalps. We must leave ther wagons an’ try ter cut our way through ther varmints an’ git back ter ther fort. In course, some, and maybe all of us ’ll git our scalps lifted, but it’s better’n waitin’ here whar thar ain’t no show at all.”

After some further discussion the guide’s plan was adopted and preparations made for the desperate undertaking. As though they anticipated the decision of the men they were hunting down, the redskins drew their lines closer around the besieged, doubling them where the trail led in the direction of the fort. As the little company stood within the square formed by the wagons, holding the bridles of their horses and waiting for the word of command, a hand was laid upon the old guide’s arm. Turning, he met the captain’s sad gaze, while a choking voice asked:

“Where do you think my boy is? Do you believe he is in their hands?”

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"No, Cap'n, I tell yer man ter man I don't. If ther red devils had er found him you'd 'a' heerd some high old yellin' over it, and we'd 'a' been treated to er sight of ther way they tortures their prisoners fer ter amuse their-selves. No, Cap'n, I believe ther young un is a-hidin' of himself, an' I only wishes as how he knowed ernough fer ter git back ter ther fort when it comes dark. Yer see, he were behind ther last of ther wagons, an'—"

A volley of rifle-shots, a blast of bugles, and a thunder of countless hoofs cut the sentence short. There, bathed in the last rays of the sunlight and rushing down the slope of the hill where the mass of Indians had gathered, was an extended line of cavalry, before whom the redskins were fleeing with howls of rage and fear.

"Come on, boys!" yelled old Bill Baxter, as he spurred his horse over a wagon-pole; "let's give some of ther devils er dose of lead as they go by!"

Like a panorama the evil faces of the painted and bedecked savages swept wildly by the little group of white men, who poured into them the contents of their rifles and cheered whenever a redskin was seen to pitch from his pony.

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As the rear rank of the cavalry charged past the wagons, one of the horses was reined to the right and halted alongside of Captain Mead's black mare. A sudden cry of joy, and Frank was clasped in his father's arms.

Around the camp-fire that night, when the story of the boy's gallant ride was told by the captain of the troopers, such cheers and bravos were given that the sneaking coyotes fled affrighted and with dismal howls across the prairie. Old Bill Baxter took off his coon-skin cap and remarked:


"I allus valleys pluck wheresome'r I find it. I axes ther company, an' 'specially ther tender-foot hero of ther camp, ter accept my willin' dispersition fer ther deed."

Colonel Cruger crossed around to where Frank sat by his father's side, and, taking the boy's hand in his, said, "In the name of each and every member of the expedition, I acknowledge our indebtedness to you for saving our lives, and, like our good friend Baxter, I uncover my head to the bravest boy on the plains."

VI

LITTLE HAWK

A Strange Buffalo-Hunt

HE old - time buffalo - hunt of the northern band of Blackfoot Indians was once made under unpleasant circumstances. It was always best for them to live close to the boundary-line between the United States and the "Canadas," but never before had they quarrelled at the same time with the British and American authorities and with their ancient neighbors and enemies the Sioux. So there was no telling at what moment their buffalo-hunt might be turned into something else — into being hunted themselves, for instance. Not a warrior or squaw or boy among them, however, had any thought or fear of being hunted or "run down" by the buffaloes. Blackfeet were nowhere safe from the Sioux, but above the boundary-line

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they were safe from the "bluecoats," and below it from the "redcoats." Bisons were not safe anywhere, for it was time that all red men should "jerk" much meat and dry it for winter consumption.

Just about the middle of the forenoon of one of the earliest days of that hunt a particularly enthusiastic Blackfoot boy was in the most unsafe place he could think of. It was the bare back of his own pony, and the pony was in the middle of a vast drove of bisons. All these were rushing madly in one direction, as if some sudden fear had taken hold of their shaggy minds, and they were sweeping the young hunter and his pony along with them. The excitement of following a fine, fat animal he had already half killed and wished to finish had carried him so far in among the tremendous game that when the "stampede" came he could not get out. He was a fine-looking boy of fifteen or sixteen, and he was armed with lance and bow and arrows. He was not now trying to do anything with his weapons. He was watching the lumbering gallop of the wild-looking, angry, frantic brutes that were now crowding and wedging closer and closer on all sides of him. His pony was

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a good one, and sprang forward through gaps in the drove, snorting and trembling with fear. There was no telling at what moment one of those mighty bulls might turn upon him, and there could be no dodging in such a press.

The boy knew well enough what would become of him under those trampling hoofs if once his pony should go down. No wonder his black eyes flashed around so eagerly over the tumult and toss and surge of that great brown flood of living creatures. On they went, and their very haste and rush was some small protection to the young hunter. The maddest bulls were in too great a hurry to stop long enough to kill him and his pony. Every now and then sharply uttered guttural sentences burst from his lips, and some of these meant:

“How long can it keep up? Stop some time? Pony go down by - and - by! Then? Ugh!”

There was a full hour of that awful riding across the undulating plain, bare of trees, and then from the crest of a roll higher than the rest could be seen a line of forest.

“Ugh! Bad! Break all to pieces!”

He saw that the torrent of bisons poured right through the woods, and he knew that

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there would be no care taken by them to select a good path for him. He felt more and more strongly that he had better be almost anywhere else. Surely he would be crushed against trees, or scraped off by branches, or else the pony would stumble in the underbrush. One huge, black-maned, furious bison bull had already made several efforts to get alongside of him, but the woods looked even more terrible than the bull.

Nobody anywhere knows where thoughts come from, and the Blackfoot Indian boy did not know what a thought was. He had never heard of such a thing, and so he did not know that it was a thought which came to him so suddenly. It came at the moment when his pony lowered his head to go under the sweeping branch of a great oak, and when the deep, hoarse bellowing on both sides of him made him shiver all over.

In one instant the pony's back was bare and the branch was occupied. The thought had said, "Throw your arms around it, and let the pony go on, but stick to your lance and bow."

The next thought that came to him was uttered aloud: "All go by. Never saw so many. Never see pony any more."

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That was enough to be gloomy over, but no rush of the bisons could break down the gnarled and rugged old oak, and it was well worth while to sit and see them go by. It was a wonder how they should all have become stampeded at once, for the Blackfeet had assailed them only on one flank. The boy wondered and made guesses about it as he sat upon the branch, until, just as the tide of quadrupeds began to thin a little, there came an explanation. More wonder and trouble and peril came with it also.

Clear and sweet and ringing, a few notes of bugle music poured in among the trees, and was replied to by thick-throated bellows of the vanishing bisons. Then a rider in a red uniform gay with gold, followed by others not quite so gay, rode up to the very tree the young hunter was watching in. It was the bugler of a company of British cavalry, and once more the "recall" sounded far and near, for there was a national reason why red uniforms could ride no farther in that direction.

One of the men who had pulled up near the bugler had been at once picked out as "Red-coat Chief," and he now suddenly exclaimed: "Orderly, see that little hawk perched in that

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tree. How did he get there? Take him. Now I'll find out where the whole band is."

"Come down, little hawk!" shouted a soldier, riding as closely as he could to the boy on the branch.

The boy looked at him and at the carbines and sabres and brilliant red uniforms. Of what use would be a lance and bow and arrows and one Blackfoot boy up a tree against all these?

Another thought came to him, and he instantly came down from the branch with a quick, lithe, springing movement. It did not put him upon the ground, but upon the back of the trooper's horse, behind the saddle. The horse reared and plunged, but the officer remarked: "All right, McGinniss. You've got him. Bring your little hawk along. He has surrendered unconditionally."

"We caught him right upon the line," said another officer. "Did you note that, Major Huntington?"

"Certainly. I saw the surveyor's mark on the tree, but the branch the little hawk was perched on came out northerly. We caged him on British territory, Captain Fay."

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“We can pump him when the interpreter comes up.”

There was a slight mistake about that. The little hawk was as silent as any other untamed bird when the interpreter tried him. He had changed his perch because of a sudden idea that nobody would shoot at him while on the new one, but he expected to be killed sooner or later. That was his idea of war, and there was war between his band of Blackfeet and all these men in red uniforms. Of course, it was his duty to die without betraying his chief and people.

That entire company of cavalry, with a score of scouts and half-breed Indians, had been hunting that drove of bisons, and the stampede was accounted for. The animals had run away from so much red, and from the bugle music. Now enough killing had been done, and the men whose business it was were gathering the best pieces of the large “game” and carrying them to camp. The officers, and the men with them, and their prisoner, rode there at once. Not a word did they extract from him on the way; but as they drew near their tents three ladies rode out to meet them. They were wives of the officers of that command,

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and the Blackfoot boy had never seen anything else so remarkable.

Major Huntington shouted to his wife, "Nelly, we've caught a little hawk!" And at that very moment he heard a voice of shrill astonishment behind him exclaim:

"Ugh! Squaw!"

The interpreter was a quick-witted man, and he instantly replied with a lot of information about those ladies. The Indian boy could not help himself after that. In a moment more they were looking in his face, and laughing merrily. He answered any question they chose to ask him, and some of his answers were true. He knew he had not put in any facts that would help the redcoats to find his people, but he told the truth about losing his pony and getting into the tree. One of the ladies gave him a pair of old yellow gloves, and made him put them on, and they all asked him to come and have some dinner. He was sure the soldiers were going to kill him by-and-by, but he went and ate his dinner bravely. It was the most remarkable meal he had ever seen or eaten, and it spoke well for him that he pricked his mouth only once with his fork. He knew from the interpreter the name they had given him.

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and Major Huntington thought he knew from him that the Blackfeet were beyond the border. British cavalry could not follow them into the United States.

"We will keep Little Hawk in camp overnight," he said, "and see if we can get any more out of him. In the morning we can let him take care of himself."

That was precisely what Little Hawk meant to do at the first opportunity. He was at war with all that camp and the whole British army, except those very liberal "squaws." They gave him a new red-and-blue blanket, and hung a brass medal around his neck by a green ribbon. In spite of all that, however, the men in red tied him up at nightfall like any other wild captive.

"Kill him another day. Ugh!" said he to himself. "Can't find Blackfeet. Little Hawk find. Ugh!"

The camp-fires burned low toward the next morning, and a thick mist came crawling down over everything in preparation for an autumnal rain-storm not many hours away. Under the heavy cover of the darkness and the fog tough young fingers toiled at the secrets of hard knots till they solved them. There were soldiers

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asleep close by, but the men had hunted vigorously, and their slumbers were sound.

One by one the knots gave it up, and then it was as if a shadow slipped away through the grass toward the "corral," where the spare horses were tethered. The sentinel on duty there heard no sound and saw nothing. Little Hawk had marked where to find a bridle, and he needed no saddle. The mist settled more and more heavily, and the remaining half-hours crept rapidly away. So did Little Hawk, until he deemed it safe to mount his new horse.

"Ugh! Not killed this time! Little Hawk got horse. Worth ten ponies. Ugh!"

He wanted to whoop, and had to hold his breath to keep it in; but there was noise enough made on his account. When the bugler sounded the "reveille" that morning he was half asleep. In a minute more the whole camp was wide awake, and in another minute all the men in it were looking for the prisoner.

"Count the horses!" shouted Captain Fay; and he had hardly said it before the corporal of the guard touched his cap to him with:

"One bridle missing, sir. One of the best spare horses gone, sir."

"The Little Hawk!" exclaimed the captain,

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stamping hard with one foot only, because he had not yet pulled on his left boot. He was red in the face, and there was much red in many other faces in that camp, and there were many and varied exclamations. The ladies had a great many things to say.

It was just so, later in the day, in a camp of Blackfeet Indians a number of miles away from any place where Major Huntington was likely to search for them. Every soul stopped work upon the buffalo meat they were "jerk-ing," and hastened to hear the story to be told by a boy who came riding swiftly in. It was a great story, but every word of it was true, and it had to be believed.

At the end of it a gray-headed chief stepped out and carefully examined all that had been captured from the British army by the boy the British army had captured in the old oak. He loudly announced his decision: "Little Hawk! Big brave some day. Trade pony for horse. Keep horse. Keep blanket. Running Bull is a great chief. Trade Little Hawk another bridle for redcoat bridle. Ugh?"

That was the end of it, except that Little Hawk's father was also a great chief, and traded a good pony with him for the horse,

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and his mother traded an old blanket with him for the new one. Nobody could trade anything with him for the glory of his adventure, or for the brass medal, or for the fact that he had eaten one pale-face dinner with a knife and fork. The pony he lost was never heard of again, and may have decided to become a bison.

VII

THE LOST SCOUT

In the Den of a Mexican Lion



FOR several years after the Civil War a familiar figure in Brownsville was that of "Texas Bill."

This man had been a scout in the army of General Canby, was a great favorite with all who knew him, and was seldom seen without a Spencer carbine, which he had brought out of the service with him, and used now to earn a living—for Bill was a famous hunter.

So far as known, the kindly, whole-souled fellow had not an enemy in the world, and when, in the summer of 1872, he suddenly disappeared from his accustomed haunts, those interested in his fate supposed that he had tired of a wandering life and had gone back to the Eastern States.

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Such an abrupt move was quite in keeping with the man's character, and no one troubled much about it, except a certain steadfast friend of his, one Captain Holden, who had engaged Bill to procure for him a jaguar pelt, for which he was to pay fifty dollars; and naturally he felt much disappointed and surprised at the non-fulfilment of the contract.

In the month of September, 1878, this same Captain Holden, Sam Ogilvie, Ed Burton, Charlie Wishart, and myself, with our guide, Joe, six saddle-horses, and three pack-ponies, were encamped sixty miles from Brownsville, on the Rio Santa Juanita, a river flowing from the west into the Laguna de la Madre.

We had come out for a big hunt, but had as yet seen no game, except one large buck, which Ogilvie cleverly missed while the animal stood, broadside on, at a distance of only eighty yards from him. This was doubtless quite satisfactory to the deer, but bade fair to be the death of poor Sam, who was likely never to hear the last of it.

On the second morning of our stay, Joe roused us at daybreak by the startling announcement that during the night one of the pack-ponies had been killed and half eaten by

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some beast of prey, which he confidently affirmed to be "a Mexican tiger—what you folks calls a jaguar."

Five miles from us there was a heavy piece of chaparral, and in this, Joe said, the gorged brute would be sure to take refuge. In less than thirty minutes after hearing of our loss we had breakfasted and were on the war-path, bent on vengeance.

"What makes you think that a jaguar killed the pony, Joe? Might it not have been done by a puma or a wolf?" asked Ed Burton as we rode along.

"Think? Well, I don't have to think. I seen the critter's track, an' I knowed it jest 's easy as you'd know the print of your own high-heeled boot," replied the old hunter.

We had purposely refrained from bringing hounds with us on this expedition, as we all preferred still-hunting, but, on coming to the dense, tangled thicket where the marauder was supposed to lurk, we almost regretted the omission, it appearing rather doubtful whether the cover could be beaten without the aid of dogs.

However, after we had dismounted and secured our horses at a safe distance, Joe, carrying a lasso in his hand, led us in a silent search

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along the edge of the chaparral; but for some time even his keen eyes could detect no sign of any living creature having penetrated the mass of rank vegetation.

We had gone, perhaps, half-way around the grove when we came to an old fallen tree, lying at right angles to our line of advance and reaching far into the thick bushes.

On seeing this, the guide motioned us to halt, while he stooped down and crawled along the rotten timber, closely scanning its surface, and sometimes even touching it with his nose. Presently he backed out and said: "We've got the varmint straight 's a rifle-bar'l, gents! This 'ere's his reg'lar run. I kin see his trail; an', more'n that, I kin scent him. Jest squint 'long the openin' for yerselves."

One after the other we did so, and, after getting used to the deep shade, could see, beyond the end of the log, a kind of tunnel, evidently made by the numberless passings to and fro of some animal of considerable size. It was not a particularly pleasant-looking place to explore in search of a jaguar, but we all felt as if we had lost one and must find him.

Sam Ogilvie and Charlie Wishart were left to guard the entrance, and the other four of us,

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with Joe in the lead, crept cautiously in single file along the trail, which we found abominably hot, dark, and crooked. Indeed, in an hour's hard work we did not advance in a direct line more than four hundred yards. Then we came to a tolerably open space almost clear of bushes and vines, but strewn thickly with great, irregular masses of rock and big bowlders, among which we could walk about with comparative ease.

"We're close onto the critter now, I reckon," Joe whispered. "Let's spread out an' hunt up his den. But keep yer eyes peeled. He'll likely lay low, seein' he's chock-full of horse-meat, but these brutes is mighty on-sartin."

We scattered apart, and very carefully, in absolute silence, began to thread the rocky labyrinth, each man holding his Winchester at the "ready." We had not been for five minutes so engaged, when Joe, with no attempt at concealment, shouted:

"I've treed the varmint! Leastways, I've holed him, which is 'bout the same."

On hurrying up we found the old guide standing, with poised rifle, before a great pile of jagged rocks, at the bottom of which was

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an almost circular hole about two feet in diameter.

"Is the jaguar in there, Joe?" asked Holden.

"Well, he ain't nowhar else," grinned Joe. "The consarned fool wuz layin' right out on the open sunnin' of hisself, an' blessed if I didn't 'most tumble atop of him, but he dodged in 'fore I waked up enough to shoot. I reckon there wuz *two* fools met that time."

A consultation was now held, and, as it became at once evident that none of us so yearned for a jaguar as to be anxious to go in after him, some plan must be devised to bring him out.

We examined the mass of rocks on all sides, and convinced ourselves that there was no other entrance to or exit from the cave; but at the rear we found a deep crack, which seemed to reach the interior, and I suggested that we should try to expel the brute by smoke. Joe highly approving the idea, Burton kindled a fire in the fissure, and we saw with delight that the flame drew inward, and he then went hopefully on, feeding the smudge with rotten sticks and leaves. The guide planted himself on the rock immediately above the entrance, close inside the circumference of which he had ar-

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ranged the loop of his lasso, while Captain Holden and I took up our stations about twenty yards in front. In less than ten minutes smoke wreaths began to creep out of the cave's mouth, and these increased until it became certain that no living thing could long remain inside.

A few seconds more passed away, and then Joe yelled: "Look out, gents, Ole Spotty's goin' to make a break! I kin hear him sneezin' like he had a cold in his head. When he does come, it 'll be rayther kind of suddin, an' if the lasso misses, you'll have to shoot quicker'n lightnin'."

"All serene, Joe! Let him come!" said Holden; and even as he spoke we heard a half-screaming, half-choking cry, something between the midnight yowl of a quarrelsome cat and a tiger's roar, and the next instant Joe was jerked from his coign of vantage, hurled to the rocky floor below, and knocked, for the moment, senseless.

The lasso had caught the jaguar all right enough, but, unfortunately, Joe, who had twined the loose end around his own arm, did not make due allowance for the weight and momentum of the beast. Hence when the

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line tightened around its neck he was plucked like a bird from his perch. It was extremely lucky for him that as he fell the cord slackened and slipped off his arm, else he might have fared badly, for so dense was the smoke that Holden and I could not even see the mouth of the cave, much less venture to shoot. When we saw him fall, however, we both sprang forward, but only to be met and dashed to the earth by the jaguar's outward rush. As the frantic animal bounded over our prostrate forms a blind stroke of his fore paw alighted by chance upon Holden's left shoulder and tore through coat and underclothing deep into the flesh. But the captain, in the excitement of the moment, was quite unaware of the blow, and we jumped to our feet in time to see the agile monster gliding around the corner of a big rock, trailing the free end of the lasso after him. Having no time to raise our guns to a sighting position, we both fired from the hip, and both, of course, missed. Then, with some rather rash remarks, we turned to look after Joe. The tough old fellow was already sitting up, not much the worse for his tumble, though nearly choked by smoke and seeming a little dazed. On being led beyond the pungent

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fumes, he quickly rallied, and, while skilfully dressing Holden's wound, quaintly said:

"Gentlemen, if you happen to hear of any lunatic 'sylum or crazy showman what wants to buy a double-distilled, shuck-headed, nat'ral-born ijjiut dirt cheap, jest send 'em along. I'll drop to the first bid. To think that ole Joe, what's roped all kind of varmints, from grizzly b'ars to buffler calves, should be sich a onmentionable fool as to spect to stop a whoppin' big tiger 'without tyin' his lasso eend to suthin' heftier nor hisself, seems most orful redicklus; but I actilly reckoned to hold the critter long 'nuff for you folks to shoot."

Now, when the jaguar made off, he did not take to his old path through the chaparral, but disappeared, as I have said, around a corner of the field of broken rocks, perhaps, in all, ten acres in extent. To the eye of an amateur he had not left the shadow of a trail, but Joe, being a trained tracker, could follow his course almost on a run. He led us now quite rapidly along the base of the miniature mountain, until we had nearly completed its circuit, when from a point only a few rods ahead we heard a succession of horrible, half-smothered yells, and, hurrying on, saw a strange sight. The

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enraged jaguar, with protruding tongue, flaming eyes, and head turned toward us, was pulling furiously on the rawhide rope, while the fatal noose was sinking deeper and deeper into his neck.

"Quick, men! Quick and steady now!" cried Holden. "Don't miss!"

The last word was barely uttered when our rifles came to shoulder, rang out in what seemed a single report, and the fierce, beautifully spotted beast, his skull pierced by four bullets, lay before us stone dead, while with cheer upon cheer we hailed the passing of his savage life.

We found an explanation of this singular capture in the fact that in passing over a little mound of detached rock the trailing lasso had dropped between two lying at acute angles to each other, and, being drawn along to where they almost touched, the knot on the hand end of the line had caught fast and thus secured our prey.

"That gits me!" exclaimed Joe, as he prepared to remove the magnificent pelt. "If I'd knowed as much about fastenin' a rope as this 'ere tiger did, we'd bin saved a heap of bother."

While the skinning was going on, Burton went round to explore the cave, and was just

“QUICK AND STEADY NOW! DON’T MISS!”



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coming out of it again when we came up. Ed looked unusually serious as he emerged into the light, holding his hand closed over some small object.

"Boys," said he, "we've put an end to a man-eater, sure! Look at this!" opening his hand, and showing us an old, battered silver watch. "There are lots of bones of deer and other animals in there," he continued, "and at least one human skeleton. But my matches gave out before I could make a proper search."

Ogilvie and Wishart, having heard our first shots, now rejoined us, and it was decided to make a thorough exploration of the den. One by one we crept through the low passage, which proved to be about sixteen feet long, ending in a rough, roundish chamber ten feet or so in diameter and over five feet high. Notwithstanding some faint rays of light, which came through the crack where the fire had been, the noisome place was yet too dark to permit a view of its contents; but by a continuous use of matches we managed after a while to find all the larger bones of the skeleton, a pocket-knife, an iron tobacco-box, the heel and sole of a boot, and finally a rusty Spencer carbine. On seeing the weapon, Captain Holden started

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forward with a wondering cry, seized the gun, brushed the mould off its walnut stock, and exposed to view, deeply cut in the wood, this rude inscription: "Texas Bill. His Gun."

The mystery of the broken contract was at last solved.


"Poor Bill!" said our profoundly affected friend. "He was true, after all, and lost his life in trying to make good his promise."

Having no tools wherewith to dig a grave, we heaped a huge cairn of stones above the shattered remains; and then, in grateful recognition of the old scout's services to the Union, fired three volleys over his lonely sepulchre.

VIII

THE GUNSHOT MINE

A Story of Lucky "Tenderfeet"

 **E**VEN cannon whose charge often costs five hundred dollars a shot never carried so expensive a load as this old burned-out, sawed-off, muzzle-loading shot-gun, with battered barrels and nipples half gnawed off by rust.

If Peters had been a hunter, he never would have had that gun at all. If it ever saw the day when it was good for anything on four-foot game, that day was far past. It was now just a tool for short-range murder; the tool some "shot-gun messenger" on the old overland stage (before that anaconda of a railroad swallowed the Santa Fé Trail) had carried to catch "hold-ups," and no longer fit even for that. You can know a man by the company he keeps, even in guns; and I assure you it is

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not wholly fanciful to say that no man who would have that sort of a weapon could be trusted.

Yet Peters, sitting on his bunk in the log-cabin on the side of the Sierra Prieta, was giving that measly old relic such a charge as the finest two-hundred-dollar hammerless never dreamed of. First, he poured in two fingers of powder—two of Peters's thick, hairy fingers—and wadded and rammed almost as if it had been a Fourth-of-July anvil. Then he pried up a big flat rock from the hearth, took from its hiding-place there a fat buckskin pouch, untied it, and poured from it something upon a folded newspaper—something yellow, and evidently very heavy. This he turned carefully into the right-hand barrel, and then “sounded” with the rammer. Four fingers—two of powder, two of—of *shot*. A little more. Hm! Five fingers and a half—good! As much now in the other barrel—a light, careful wad on top—and Peters capped the nipples and laid the gun under the bed, with one of those peculiar smiles which indicate that the smiler is more pleased than he expects some one else to be. It was precisely the smile I should look for on a man who had just loaded his shot-gun

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with two hundred dollars in gold-dust to each barrel.

On the Sierra Prieta every one knew Peters, and no one *knew* Peters. It had been a good deal of a camp in its day, but now it was completely "played out." The big mill down the cañon was dismantled and falling to pieces; the rude little town of log-cabins was the picture of desolation. A graveyard is not so lonely as an abandoned mining-camp. But it dies hard. The restless turn away at the first omen of "quiet times." As mine after mine loses the "lead," the better men begin, slowly and reluctantly, to drift to new districts. But there are always slow, stanch fellows, not quite so enterprising, men set on one idea and patient as death, who *never* give up. They will die there. Even yet in Sierra Prieta there were left a dozen starved claims, some with one owner, some two — tired, uncomplaining men who hoped against hope, and drilled and picked and blasted, creeping on to try to find the golden vein again that once made the camp famous, but long ago "pinched out."

Peters was here when the first of the others came. He was here still. In a mining-camp every one knows every one else; but it is not

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much of a place to meddle. Peters "didn't herd with anybody." He kept away from other claims, and he had a way of keeping people away from his. He was just Peters, who owned the Blue Jay. Every one knew that he had recently returned from a month's absence — gone to New York to sell his mine, the Yankee of the camp averred; but the Yankee was only guessing. At any rate, Peters was back — big and bearded and surly as ever.

There are a great many ways to hunt; but there is only one kind of game that people go shooting in mines—not with the giant-powder blast which every miner calls a "shot," but with a real shot-gun. That game is human. And yet there was not a soul in the Blue Jay when Peters strolled up the hill that morning with the gun on his shoulder, gave a quick glance all about, and disappeared in the dark mouth of the tunnel. Not a soul; yet within five minutes there was the muffled report of a shot-gun far underground, and in a moment more another; and presently Peters emerged, tossing his candle aside, and rubbing first his ears and then his right shoulder, as though they hurt.

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It was the morning of the weekly stage to Sierra Prieta, and Peters was at the "store." An elderly man and a boy of eighteen clambered down from the top of the old Concord. The boy carried a small valise in his hand, and there were some big trunks strapped behind, with plenty of other baggage "on deck." No one had ever seen Peters so affable.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Harkness. Glad to see the both o' you. Sorry there ain't any wagons. But I reckon yo' can walk up to the Blue Jay. 'Tain't but a mile. Yo'r baggage yo' can jest leave yere with Stubbs, till I can hump it up. Let me carry yo'r grip, son"—for Peters had no slow eye, and he saw that the valise in the boy's hand was not to be left with the rest.

"Thank you; I'm used to carrying it," said Ralph, his fingers tightening a little on the handle.

"Thet's right! Good boy! Wisht I had a boy like that, Mr. Harkness. Waal, we'll set yo'r stuff in yere with Stubbs and strike out—for I reckon yo'r hungry."

An hour later the three sat down to the big box which did duty for table in Peters's cabin.

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Mountain-trout, "frying-pan bread," a broiled tenderloin of venison, and a cup of coffee constituted the breakfast. There was no question about it, Peters could cook, and his guests ate with unusual relish.

"Don't smoke, hey? Waal, set and rest awhile, anyhow," said Peters, when the meal was finished.

"I think we'd better see the mine at once, Mr. Peters," replied the elder man. "My boy and I have come a long way to look at it, and perhaps we are impatient."

"Oh, it 'll keep," said Peters, carelessly; but as he turned toward the door there was a smile in his eyes—and not a winning smile. "But just as yo' say. It's only a buck's jump from the cabin. Yo' see, I've got it handy to work and handy to guard—I don't want no sech a mine a-layin' round loose for everybody to gopher in. When yo' see it, yo'll say so, too. *Gold?* Why, the Blue Jay's that thick with gold yo' could mighty nigh pick it out with yo'r thumb!"

And so, indeed, they could. When the three came near the end of the tunnel, Peters stopped impressively. "See this yere porphyry?" he whispered, holding up his candle. "I struck

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it a-cornerin' yere, and it's *the* richest vein I ever seen. Look!" He held his candle close to the wall and planted a squat forefinger. There was a dull-yellow stain—and yonder a little grain of yellow—and here another. For fifty feet they moved slowly, peering at the walls; and everywhere the porphyry gave back that same rich flickering—here and there just glints, and again a golden grain as large as a pin-head. On both sides it was the same.

"Talk about yo'r veins!" cried Peters, in an exultant tone. "Yo' never heard of such a vein as this yere—four foot wide, *sure*, and jest stuck plumb full o' gold. Now there we're square on the breast"—and he held up his candle at the end of the tunnel. The gray rock simply sparkled with dots and grains of yellow. Mr. Harkness reached up with a little cry and picked at a nugget as big as a pea. It came out in his fingers, and he trembled like a leaf.

"I—think—we have seen enough," he stammered. "Come, Ralph. It makes me feel queer to be away underground so."

"Oh, take it easy, Mr. Harkness. Look careful. I don't want to sell no mine and then have a man kick about it. Look a' there, son!" And he pointed the boy to another little yellow

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nugget in a crevice of the wall. "That there rock 'll run ten thousand dollars to the ton, easy," he continued; "and if it wa'n't that I hain't got money to work it right I wouldn't sell no half-interest for the best hundred thousand you could shake under my nose. Why, a man gets in on this and it's like finding a million in the road—*that's* what!"

"But, of course, no one can tell how far it goes, can they?" ventured Ralph.

"Go?" echoed Peters, with fine scorn. "The further it goes, the richer it gets; and it wouldn't need to go fur, in that kind o' rock, to 'fix' a man."

When they were in the cabin again, Mr. Harkness sank down upon the one rude chair with a little shiver. Peters leaned against the fireplace with a masterful pose. How big and strong and self-contained he was! The boy stood by the rude window-ledge, handling a pile of specimens.

"It's a hard trip, that there stagin'," said Peters, pleasantly. "And when anybody ain't uset to it, it's hard work goin' through a mine. Yo'-all better rest to-day, eat hearty, and sleep hearty. And to-morrow we can see to business."

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"No; I would rather settle this matter right now," Mr. Harkness answered. Two red spots glowed in his cheeks. "I came out to look at the Blue Jay, and to buy it if it suited me. I'm satisfied."

Ralph had turned from the window. "Is there any hurry, father?" he asked, respectfully. "You know, we don't know anything about mines. Wouldn't it be a good idea to have it experted?"

"Say, that boy's a good one! Better put him at the head o' the firm! I might be a-goin' to do yo'. You'd better get an expert."

Peters wore a cool smile, but his voice was a little forced.

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Harkness, sharply. "Ralph is only a boy, and you must excuse him. Haven't I seen the thing with my own eyes? I guess I know gold when I see it! Brass doesn't generally grow in veins."

"Oh, I could have put some brass in there, Mr. Harkness. You'd better have them nuggets assayed. A stranger can't be too careful out yere."

"This is *my* business," Mr. Harkness rejoined, irritably. "I don't need to ask anybody about what I see myself. Anybody that

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can swindle *me* is welcome to. You said in New York, Peters, you'd sell for fifteen thousand dollars. I suppose the bargain holds."

For once Peters hesitated. He had been playing with fire pretty freely, just to indulge a certain grim humor in him. But now? He looked keenly at his man.

"Waal," he answered, slowly, "it ain't a circumstance for this mine. I'd hate to break a trade, but since I seen yo' in New York the mine's showin' up about ten times as good as it did. I'd ought to have more'n that for a half-interest. I don't like to be froze out of a mine that's goin' to pan out millions, jest because I'm broke. I could sell a half for double that by goin' to New York now. But you've come out yere— Wall, say fifteen thousand spot cash for a half-interest, and it's a go."

"It is a go!" cried Mr. Harkness, springing from his chair. "I meant to buy the mine, but it wouldn't be fair to 'freeze you out,' as you say. Ralph, give me that satchel."

Ralph came forward slowly. His face looked much less boyish now. It showed nothing of the nervous impulsiveness of the older man.

"Don't you think you ought to have control,

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at least, father?" he faltered. "I've heard of ever so much trouble from even holdings."

But Mr. Harkness interrupted sharply: "My son, don't be impertinent. What do you know about business? Now, Peters, write me a re—a bill of sale, I guess you call it—for fifteen thousand dollars for a half-interest in the Blue Jay. We can have Ralph and the storekeeper to witness it."

He unlocked the satchel, drew out and opened a sealed package, and began counting a fat roll of crisp bills, each with an ornamental C in the corner. Peters, with head bent low and sidewise over the table, was scratching laboriously. As for Ralph, he had shrunk back to the window, and stood there stupidly fingering a fragment of porphyry as large as his fist and threaded with yellow threads. Then of a sudden his eyes looked less stupid. He was scanning the lumps critically.

"Excuse me, Mr. Peters," he said, slowly; "are all these specimens from the Blue Jay?"

The miner did not look up. "Cert?" he answered, curtly, forming another letter.

"This one, too?" persisted the boy, walking over to the table and holding out the rock.

"Yes!" Peters snapped, and then looked up

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with a little change of face. He had been too quick.

"Because it doesn't look like the same rock to me," the boy continued. "And the gold doesn't seem to be in it the same way."

"Ralph!" cried his father, sternly.

But, though rather pale now, Ralph stood straight and held the specimen forward. "Now does it, father?" he pleaded.

"N-n— Well, I don't know as it does look just the same," the elder Harkness admitted, reluctantly. "Perhaps we'd better examine it a little furth—"

But here Peters sprang to his feet in a fine rage. "Say, you!" he growled; "that boy's too new for these diggin's. I don't want no sech pardners. Just count me out! Take the mine or leave it—I won't have no doin's with people that think I'm cinchin' 'em."

"We have no such idea, Mr. Peters," said Mr. Harkness, with dignity. "I would like the mine, but I cannot pay more than fifteen thousand dollars for a half or for the whole. That will leave me with only a few hundred dollars in the world to operate with."

Peters paced the uneven floor. "I ain't no gopher!" he cried, disdainfully. "I can find

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my way. Take the old thing! I'd sooner give yo' the Blue Jay offhand than stay in with any sech tenderfeet!"

"Just put it on paper," said Mr. Harkness, coolly. "You cannot give us the mine; but if you will sell it for fifteen thousand dollars, here's your money."

It was a week before there was any real work done on the Blue Jay. Peters had left almost before the ink was dry on the bill of sale, a mocking smile on his face and one hand clinched inside a bulging pocket. The Harknesses pottered at the shaft and knocked off a few specimens; but they knew nothing about mining, and it was useless to proceed without some one who did. Stubbs was out of giant-powder, too—the poor camp used very little now, and Stubbs was too long in the West to carry an overstock. It was impossible to hire miners in Sierra Prieta. No one was left now save those who owned their claims—poor men, every one, but independent, as the American miner in the West always is. Didn't Jonas own the Last Chance? Mightn't he "strike it" any day? Of course, a man with millions just ahead would not go out to work for wages.

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Every other man in camp was of the same attitude, except Stubbs, who had his dingy store and post-office. And he was no miner, anyhow.

But after a tedious week two Mexican miners came up on the stage from Placerville, and a box of giant-powder cartridges, on which the expressage was three times the cost, and at last the ring of drilling began to be heard in the bowels of the Blue Jay. Then all was ready for a "shot." The quiet brown miners slipped the greasy cartridges into the drill-holes, and tamped, and set the fuse, and lit it, and ran away. There was a stifled, persistent roar; the earth shivered; a strong wind came bellying out, full of stuffy odors, and the four men went in—two of them running. A heap of splintered rocks strewed the floor, and Mr. Harkness knelt among them, pulling them over nervously, and sometimes singeing his hair at the candle, he peered so closely.

"This doesn't look very rich," he muttered, disconsolately. "Ah, *here* it is! Pretty good—eh, Pedro?"

The Mexican looked the fragments over deprecatingly. "No good," he answered, politely, showing the fresher edges where were none

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of the yellow stains which showed on one side.
“All on the old breast; no more inside.”

“What do you mean? What difference does it make, so long as the gold is there?”

But Pedro shrugged his shoulders, in the way of his people when no other answer seems to fit.

Another week went by, and the faces in the cabin of an evening were gloomy. The two Mexicans were working steadily, and Ralph was learning. Already he could swing a handy sledge in the drilling, and knew the simple tricks of firing a “shot.” Mr. Harkness walked nervously about, inspecting the tunnel and the work, giving and countermanding directions, and frequently going down to the store to consult with Stubbs, who was oracular in proportion to his ignorance of mines. It would never do to let a “tenderfoot” imagine that a man who had been West for six years, even as a storekeeper, didn’t know everything. If all Stubbs’s advice could have been taken, the Blue Jay would certainly have become the most remarkable mine on earth.

It was only when the Harkness ownership of the Blue Jay was a month old that light came. A stained and shaggy man, who had evidently been at work more recently than at anything

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else, strolled up the trail on Saturday afternoon and made his way into the tunnel.

"Howdy! I'm Adams; got the Happy Thought, over yonder. Been yere six years, and hain't made a grubstake out of it yet. But I'll reach it. I heard you fellows 'd bought Peters out, and I thought I'd come up and have a look. Peters, he never would let nobody inside the Blue Jay; but I reckoned you - all wouldn't be so close-communion."

"We are glad to see you, Mr. Adams," said Harkness, despondently. "We haven't had time to be neighborly, but we want to be friends with the camp. Perhaps you can tell us what's the matter in here. We are new to mining, and things don't seem to go right."

"Never did go right," Mr. Adams observed, grimly, "unless the Blue Jay's different from the rest of the camp, and I'm keen to see. I been battin' myself to reckon how Peters ever made out to sell."

"Why, it was very rich when we bought. You could see free gold almost anywhere on the walls. But now we can't seem to find any at all."

"It was, hey? Waal, it sure has ceased continuing." Mr. Adams ran his candle critically

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along the walls and breast. "I don't see no more signs of a vein than there is in Stubbs's counter."

"It's *all* a vein!" Mr. Harkness answered, rather sharply. "I can show you, at the house, rocks that will go ten thousand dollars to the ton, they tell me. And back here you can see some of it."

"Who told you — Peters?" asked Adams, dryly, as they walked back to the point the Harknesses had first inspected. "Ya-as, I see," he drawled, as Mr. Harkness pointed out the particles here and there. "I never noticed quite that formation before, but I reckon I know it. Got any of the rock you took off the breast Peters showed you? Let's see that."

At the cabin Mr. Harkness handed him several specimens. He looked them over a couple of times, and laid them down thoughtfully.

"Did Peters leave his gun when he quit?" he asked.

"I guess so; at any rate, there's an old shot-gun here, but it isn't good for anything. Why?"

"Oh, nothing much—only I reckon it was a

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pretty good gun to Peters. Can't you see that gold never grewed in them rocks? The grains lay pretty nice, but don't you see the streaks, like as if you had rubbed a piece of brass along the rock? How do you s'pose gold gets that sort of action in a vein?"

"But look at this," protested Mr. Harkness, who was very pale now. "Isn't this all right? The gold is all through the rock."

"Yes, the rock's all right enough, and that's the way that gold grows. But that ain't out of the Blue Jay. Anybody could tell it come out of the Good Hope, down to Placerville. So did all the rest o' this," continued Adams, handling specimen after specimen from the window-ledge. "Don't you see it's all wire gold—and the rock ain't any more like Blue Jay rock than I'm like a house afire. Show me that gun."

He smiled grimly as the battered arm was handed him. "That's a great piece to go a-gunning with—but I reckon Peters knowed his game. Look a' that!" He wet his horny second finger and twisted it around inside the muzzle. A black smudge came off on his finger; but in the rim of the barrel several little

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yellow streaks gleamed dimly through the remaining dirt.

"But I—I—don't understand yet," stammered Mr. Harkness, going white and red by turns, while Ralph stood pale and still as a statue.

"I hope the hill don't fall onto you," observed Adams, evidently trying to conceal his contempt. "Well, Peters, he got tired of developin' cold porphyry, so he turns in to work somethin' easier. He must 'a' gone down to Placerville and begged, borrowed, and stole all the gold-dust he could scrape—and there's jest fools enough there to lend him. Then he loads up this scatter-gun with a few ounces in each barrel and turns loose on the walls and breast o' the Blue Jay. Enough sticks to fool a green-horn—and there you are. If you'd 'a' paid a hundred to a Denver expert, or any man that knowed anything about mines, why, I reckon you'd 'a' saved mon—"

But Ralph cried "Hush!" and sprang to catch his father, who reeled and would have fallen. They got him upon the bunk, and Adams tore open his collar and chafed his nerveless hands, while the boy ran for water.

"Reckon I was too suddent," the miner

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grumbled, apologetically, to himself. "But who'd 'a' thought a grown man could get buncoed that easy?"

Those were anxious days and nights for Ralph. Brain-fever is not a pleasant thing to watch anywhere, in any one; and alone in the mountains, far from doctors and nurses and good food and other facilities, it is doubly hard. A courier brought the doctor from Placerville on the third day. He made up medicines and gave directions, and promised to be back in a week; but to all Ralph's pleadings he could only say, kindly: "I'm sorry, my boy, but I can't stay. There are a dozen people in Placerville that need me even worse. Your father will come out all right, I think—for you'll take good care of him."

And Ralph did. Every day, too, Adams trudged up the trail, and fairly drove the boy out for an hour or two of fresh air, sitting by the patient meanwhile and ministering to him with awkward gentleness. Ralph laid off the two miners. "I think the mine is no good," he said to them.

"No, señor," they answered, respectfully.

"Then why didn't you tell my father?"

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“Had he not eyes? And the señor did not like to be told things.”

The fever was spent at last, and Mr. Harkness opened his eyes with a soberer light in them. He was very weak, but the delirium was past. And yet the long days were hard to both father and son. They conversed little, for the thing that was uppermost in their minds must not be talked about now.

But one day, as their eyes met, the thought was so close to the surface that they could not push it back. Ralph's eyes filled, and his father laid a feeble hand upon his head. “My poor boy!” he whispered, “I have wasted it all! How can you ever forgive me? Your poor mother meant it to give you a good start in the world, and I have ruined you and myself.”

“No, no, father! Not that. I don't mind for me. It was just a mistake. That rascal was too smart for us.”

“Too smart for me, you mean. You had better sense, Ralph, but I wouldn't listen. Your mother was the balance-wheel—so quiet and clear-sighted and observing—and I needed

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that very thing. Oh, what a poor credulous, selfish fool!"

"Don't, father!" and the boy laid his head to the one on the pillow. "We can fight it out when you get well."

It was the day before they were to leave the Sierra Prieta forever. For all his courage, Ralph's heart was heavy. Himself—well, he was young and strong, and he would have worked, anyhow. But his father had aged greatly. All that nervous buoyancy was gone, and he walked feebly up and down the little path by the door.

"I think I'll say good-bye to the old hole in the ground, anyhow," thought Ralph, in the afternoon, when his father was dozing. "We've buried a good many hopes there, but somehow I'm sorry to leave it. I guess it has taught me something, too, and I don't suppose the Blue Jay is to blame. It's that wretched Peters I wish ill to."

He strolled over to the tunnel, lighted a candle, and walked in. Here was where Peters had shown them the first nuggets in the wall—no danger of forgetting *that* place. Here was where they had begun work on the breast;

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a little jog in the tunnel marked that. This side he could still make out a few yellow streaks, and even two or three golden grains lodged in crevices. Ralph looked at them grimly. Beyond, there was nothing of the sort. They had tunnelled forty feet without finding a "color." Ralph smiled bitterly, and then began looking hard at the roof to his left.

Precisely two feet from where Peters had left off work one of their blasts had gouged a deep splinter of rock from the roof, and queer shadows from the candle danced in the angles of the hollow. As the flame guttered and flashed up, there looked to be a streak across one corner of the cavity—two dark lines, no thicker than a knife-blade and not an inch apart. Ralph held up the candle close. There was a streak, and between the thin, dark lines was lighter rock, which caught the light here and there as if in tiny sparks. Hot drops from the candle fell on the boy's face, but he did not notice. He was trembling violently. He knew very little about mines, but he was not dull. He brought a drill and pecked away fiercely at that narrow stripe in the rock, and chipped out a sliver as large as his little finger. And when he came to the mouth of the tunnel with

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it, and held it up in the fair sunlight, and saw it pricked over everywhere with innumerable yellow particles, he started on a run for the cabin, whooping, laughing, and sobbing all in a breath.

It was something like six months later that a couple of men who would have passed for tramps anywhere sat in a cheap lunch-room in Denver. The larger man, a bearded, surly fellow, eyed the remains of their shabby meal with plain disgust.

"That's a fine set-out, and it takes my last two bits," he grumbled, fumbling a quarter. "What a fool a fool is! I've spent fifteen thousand in eight months, and hain't got a bean to show for it."

"Yes, you did!" sneered the other. "Fifteen thousand monkeys!"

"Don't get funny," the first speaker retorted, angrily. "It's a cold fact. I sold a mine to a sucker in the Sierra Prieta for fifteen thousand dollars in green hundreds, and it wa'n't worth fifteen cents."

"In the Sierra Prieta? I was jest thinkin' o' goin' up there. I seen in the paper this mornin' that there's a boom up there." And,

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picking up a paper, he found this item and handed it to Mr. Peters:

“A. J. Harkness and son are in the city to arrange for the erection of a hundred-stamp mill on their property—the Gunshot Mine, formerly known as the Blue Jay. The mine was supposed to be worthless, but in the last few months the Harknesses have struck a two-foot vein of free-milling ore which runs away up in the thousands. It is understood that they have refused half a million for a half-interest in the Gunshot. There is a rush on, and Sierra Prieta bids fair to regain its old fame among our mining-camps.”

IX

THE SIEGE OF "FORT BOOMERANG"

A Fight for a Mine

OR a mining-camp, Oreville was a remarkably respectable and well-behaved place. The twenty cabins or more composing it had been built on a flat in Chloride Gulch, and, as no care had been taken to arrange them symmetrically, the camp had a somewhat tumbled-together look that was comfortable rather than ugly. Among the residents none was more respected by his neighbors than Tom Wilson, who lived in a cozy cabin, situated at the western extremity of the town, with his partner, Matt Powers. These two were industrious, steady-going fellows, engaged in prospecting. Their pet mining claim was called the Boomerang, and they would have told you, had you asked them about it, that it was going to be the best claim in the

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State of Colorado. They were perfectly honest in this opinion of its prospective value. Nearly every prospector has a claim which he imagines is going to be "the best in the State, sir." Everybody else in Oreville thought well of the Boomerang, too, and was glad that it was a good piece of property, both for the sake of the owners, who were so much liked, and for the effect it would have upon the value of other property in the neighborhood. The finding of one good mine gives a boom to an entire mining district. So it came to pass that the Boomerang's reputation as a valuable property spread far and wide. Its possession was almost the same as having a fortune, and it is quite likely that there were those who envied Wilson and Powers, its owners.

Autumn had come, and Oreville was deserted except by Wilson and his partner. Winter in the mountains of Colorado is long and severe; deep snow covers the ground for many months, and makes communication between outlying camps and larger towns very uncertain. Prospectors and others who are occupied among the mountain peaks and gulches in summer-time are generally glad to flee to civilization before the first heavy snow comes. Sometimes, though,

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they determine to push work throughout the cold weather, and this is just what Wilson and Powers had done. Satisfied that their claim would eventually repay all their trouble, they thought it best to lose no time in developing it, and to work steadily until spring instead of stopping, as every one else in the gulch had done.

The Boomerang lay near the crest of a hill which shut in the gulch on the south. The working shaft was not more than a thousand yards away from the cabin, and a trail could be kept open. Work could be carried on except in the severest weather. A little labor bestowed upon the cabin would make it weather-proof and comfortable at all times; so a good stock of "grub," fire-wood, and giant-powder was laid in, and the two men prepared to spend a winter separated from their fellow-creatures. When once snow came to stay, Chloride Gulch would be completely shut off from civilization until late in the following spring. But this did not disturb the prospectors at all. Work would keep them busy. They had no fear of long and weary days idly spent.

One day in October Tom set out for a town where he had business to dispose of before

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winter came on. He expected to be gone four or five days. This town was quite a large one, and was about eighteen miles from Oreville by trail. There was a wagon-road, too, but by that the distance was fully seven miles greater. The trail was always used by any one going afoot, and Tom went that way. He started after breakfast, and easily reached his destination in time for dinner at one o'clock. His business was finished by the next evening, and he took a stroll after supper to see the sights. While passing along a brilliantly lighted street he happened to look through the glass door of a store, just inside of which stood a man whom he recognized as an old acquaintance. Tom joined him, and the two chatted together for some time. Then the other man went into the street, and Tom, having nothing better to do, turned to read some handbills and theatre advertisements which hung upon the wall. While thus engaged, his back toward the centre of the room, two men entered from the street. They were talking together earnestly, and, as they stopped quite near Tom, he could not help overhearing part of their conversation. Great was his surprise to learn that it related to the Boomerang. The speakers he immediately recog-

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nized as two men by the name of Donnelly, who had lived in Oreville all summer. Listening, then, with all his might, Tom heard the following conversation:

"We kin jump that claim as well as not, Bill."

"How d'ye know we kin?"

"Why, there ain't another man in Chloride Gulch but Wilson an' his pardner. We kin run them off easy enough, and take possession of the ground."

"Maybe they'll come back."

"They won't come back. We'll scare that notion clear out of their heads. We'll run 'em into Kansas or Nebrasky, if we have to, and they won't never come back."

"Well, it's a mighty good claim, and worth getting."

"Of course it is. Will ye jine us, Bill?"

"'Course I will."

"All right, then. Wetherby and Briggs are in the game, and we'll all go down to the gulch to-morrow. After dark we can take possession. It will be easy enough to hold it afterward. Meet me to-morrow morning at—" And here the two men moved toward the counter, and Tom could hear nothing more. But he had

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heard enough. The Boomerang was to be "jumped."

Society in the mining regions is very much mixed, and includes a great number of men who are not at all particular as to the honesty of the methods they select for gaining wealth. Such are the men who "jump" claims—that is, unlawfully take possession of them by force or deceit—and such were the Donnelly brothers and their partners, Wetherby and Briggs. These four had occupied a cabin in Oreville not far from Wilson's, and had tried hard to become intimate with him, no doubt with a view to profiting in some way by his ownership of the Boomerang. Wilson and Powers, however, never liked the "Donnelly outfit," and more than once exchanged views regarding them.

"They're a bad lot," said Matt one day to Tom. The objectionable four had just started homeward after making a visit which had done nothing toward lessening the unfavorable impression already made.

"That's what they are," replied Tom. "I believe that fellow Wetherby is a gambler, or worse."

"Briggs is no better," added Matt, "and I

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can't help thinking that they both feel more at ease here in the woods than they'd be likely to in town, where sheriff's officers are running about pretty thick."

"You mean that they are hiding?" asked Tom.

"That's just what I mean."

"Well, you may be right," said Tom, thoughtfully. "Anyway, I don't fancy any of the outfit, and it seems to me we'd better give them a wide berth."

If nothing ever verified Tom's suspicions that the "Donnelly outfit" deserved no higher esteem, the conversation he accidentally overheard in the store proved that his neighbors of the past summer were claim-jumpers—robbers that meant to rob himself and his partner of property acquired by hard labor. His blood boiled at the thought, and his first impulse was to turn and defy the rascals to carry out their plot. A more sober second thought, however, told him that such a course would do him no good. In fact, it would make the jumpers more cautious, but it would not frighten them out of their scheme. For an instant he was at a loss to know what to do; then stern resolution came to his aid, and he hesitated no longer. He

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would defend his property with his life, if need be.

There was not a moment to lose, and he quickly but quietly passed into the street. It was just nine o'clock. A great round moon looked down from the sky above, and flooded the country roundabout with a silver light that was beautiful to see; but in the glare that illuminates the sidewalks of a large, bustling mining-camp, this calm, soft light could barely make itself seen. Tom knew, though, that it would make walking easy, and, with a glance behind to see if he were followed, he set off at a rapid pace. His destination was Oreville. Pausing only long enough to buy a lunch and cram it into his pocket, he dodged through the crowd which blocked the street, and made his way as fast as possible out of town. Once in the open country, his gait quickened. The night was cold and perfectly clear. Snow had fallen on the hills only a few hours before, and now lay like a light mantle, reflecting back the moonlight until the darkness all but disappeared. Tom sped along, up hill and down, for he was going to fight for his fortune. The thought nerved him to walk as he had never walked before, and he felt no weariness.

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Matt Powers was sleeping as only a tired and healthy man can sleep, when a vigorous pounding on the cabin door brought him to his senses, and caused him to sing out, "Hello, there! what do you want?"

"Let me in quick. It's me, Tom, your partner."

Matt jumped from his bunk and opened the door.

"Matt," said Tom, as he entered, too indignant to wait even one second before beginning his story, "they're going to jump the Boomerang!"

"Who is?" demanded Matt, firing up like a heap of dry shavings when a lighted match is applied.

"The Donnelly outfit," gasped Tom, dropping on a bunk. "I heard 'em talking about it, an' they're coming down here to-morrow to try it on."

He then related exactly what had happened in town, and repeated word for word the conversation he had overheard in the store. He wound up by saying, "Now we've got a fight on our hands."

"That's what we have," said Matt, "and we'll win it, too. They may carry me out

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of this gulch, but they'll never run me out."

"And they'll have to carry two of us out," said Tom. "I'll never run away from the Boomerang. Now come, let's calculate a little. There will be at least four in that gang; we're only two. Can we get any help?"

"I don't believe there is another man within ten miles of us," answered Matt, "but we've got some pretty good friends here," and, putting aside a gunny-sack that hung against the wall, he produced two sixteen-shot Winchester rifles. They had also two six-barrelled revolvers, and could thus fire forty-four shots without loss of time for loading. "That's a good many bullets to go flying around loose," said Matt, grimly. "Somebody or other ought to get hurt if we fire 'em all off."

"Those fellows will have as many more to let go," remarked Tom. "It 'll be like the Fourth o' July if we get right down to business."

"Thought they could run us off easily, did they?" said Matt, with a kind of growl. "We'll teach 'em a trick or two about running."

Then followed a council of war to discuss

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plans for repulsing the enemy, and, having decided how to conduct the campaign, the two men went to bed for a few hours' sleep. Day-break found them at breakfast, and immediately after that meal they began to prepare for the fight which was expected to take place that night. Taking a suit of old clothes, they stuffed it with gunny-sacks and grass, until a fair imitation of a human figure was produced. A head made of a bag was added, and on this was secured a hat which nearly covered the rudely painted face. The figure was cunningly made, and at a short distance would easily deceive. Strings were fastened to its arms, and a frame to hang it upon was made. An important part in the battle had been assigned to this marionette, and nothing must be neglected that could help to make the part successful. This having been completed, Tom and Matt carried it all up to the Boomerang shaft. Depositing their burden behind a large rock, they next took a survey of the ground.

They stood in a "park," or clear space, on the hilltop. Heavy timber approached to within one hundred and fifty yards of the shaft on all sides. The enemy, anticipating no resistance, would doubtless approach by the regular

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trail leading up-hill from Oreville. They could not gain the shaft without crossing the park, and in so doing must expose themselves to a hot fire. It was an admirable post to defend, and could be held against a large force. Matt and Tom took all this in at a glance. Their next move was to roll a number of large bowlders to the head of the trail, and arrange them there in a row. It was intended to start them downhill toward the attacking force when the right minute should come, and the slope was so steep that they would roll with irresistible power.

When the two men returned to their cabin they loaded rifles and pistols to the utmost, and made ready a portable electric battery, ordinarily used for blasting rock. With this contrivance a blast could be fired from a distance by means of connecting wires, which could be made as long as needed. It, too, was to be used in the coming battle. Having proved the battery to be in good order, the prospectors carefully closed the cabin and started for their claim, carrying the weapons and electric battery, together with some coils of wire and giant-powder. On their way up the hill they took pains to leave a great many footprints in the snow, thus making the trail look as though

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quite a large party of men had recently passed over it.

The dummy figure was found undisturbed where it had been left earlier in the day, and, while Matt busied himself in preparing it for action, Tom planted two "masked batteries," one on each side of the trail. These consisted of two sticks of giant-powder held in place by fragments of rock and connected by wire with the electric battery in camp.

All was now ready for the attack, and the garrison sat down to watch and wait behind a huge rock that was to be their fort. The frame from which dangled the dummy was simply an upright post having an arm, or beam, extending at right angles from the top. This beam projected a couple of feet from behind the rock, but the rest of the apparatus was concealed from view. The dummy, hanging from the beam, could be made to walk out in plain sight of the besiegers, his motions being controlled by strings; but having nothing to do yet, he waited for the fight to begin without saying a word. The garrison, too, was quiet. Darkness came on, and soon a magnificent moon looked out from behind the mountain-range east of "Fort Boomerang." It lighted up the little

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park and Chloride Gulch, and showed Ore-ville in the distance, but no sound was heard in any of these places. Nine o'clock came, then ten, then eleven. Tom and Matt began to wonder if all their preparations had been made for nothing. They began to grow weary as midnight approached. The moon was well up in the sky, when from Chloride Gulch came the sound of voices. The enemy had arrived and was about to begin the assault.

The Boomerang's defenders glanced at each other, then at their weapons and defensive preparations, and waited in perfect silence. The would-be claim-jumpers, on the other hand, evidently thought it unnecessary to conduct their movement cautiously. Not looking for resistance, and expecting an easy triumph, they moved along talking and laughing. In the still night air their voices could plainly be heard at the fort. On reaching the trail, however, this state of things was suddenly changed. The ruse of the footprints was successful, and the "Donnelly outfit," imagining from all these fresh tracks in the snow that a large force of men was gathered at the Boomerang, began to wonder whether, after all, the capture of that claim was going to be so easy a

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matter. A council of war was held, and three men out of the four voted to abandon the field; but the fourth, Wetherby, the greatest scamp of them all, suggested a cowardly, murderous scheme by which he assured the others of success, and once more they all advanced toward the Boomerang, but this time without speaking a word. The garrison in the fort, watching sharply for the enemy, at last saw four figures emerge from the timber and move silently across the park until within seventy-five yards' range. Then Tom's voice rang out clear and strong, "Who goes there?"

The enemy halted, and a general cocking of pistols was heard. No answer being made to Tom's challenge, he repeated it still louder. Wetherby answered, "Friends!" but his tone wasn't very friendly.

"What do you want?" demanded Tom.

Again all was quiet, and Tom presently continued:

"I'll tell you what you want. You want to jump this claim, and you can't do it. We've got men here, and if you don't skip in ten seconds, we'll blow you all clean off the face of the earth. Now git!"

Though somewhat staggered by Tom's speech,

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the jumpers did not "git" immediately. A moment's pause was followed by Wetherby saying,

"Hold on, pardner; send a man out here, and let's talk this thing over."

He thought his proposition would be accepted, and intended to shoot down whoever should appear, and then with his party make a rush for the fort. Tom and Matt were not simple enough to be deceived in any such fashion, and allow themselves to be shot. The dummy had been made for the very purpose of drawing the enemy's fire, and the funny-looking object moved gravely forth from behind the rock fort and turned toward Wetherby.

"Now what do you want?" asked Tom, speaking for the dummy. At the same time he pulled a string which raised one of the creature's arms with quite a natural air.

The apparition entirely deceived the jumpers, and they answered with a volley. Several bullets buried themselves in the gunny-sack intestines of the unhappy dummy, which was instantly allowed to fall down. At the same time Tom gave a groan that would have required the last breaths of a dozen dying men. Much elated by their supposed murder, the be-

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siegers rushed forward to slay the rest of the garrison; but they had hardly advanced thirty yards up the hill before a hot fire was opened upon them, and so rapidly did the garrison handle their firearms that the fusillade seemed to come from five or six men, instead of two. To aid the deception, the garrison shrieked and yelled in half a dozen different keys, and made noise enough for a dozen men. The attacking force, somewhat alarmed at the uproar, paused, and at that moment Matt started one of the bowlders which had been placed near the trail. The stone rolled along, rapidly gathering way as it moved, and the men in its path ran aside to avoid it.

Just then Tom touched off one of the masked batteries. Giant-powder explodes with a great noise, and the "Donnelly outfit," hearing a loud report on their flank, concluded they were attacked on that quarter by a park of artillery. This danger, added to the increasing shower of rocks and bullets that assailed them in front, dismayed them still more. Their nerve failed, and they gave up the siege. Some of them cried for quarter, but to no purpose. Bullets flew overhead, and bowlders skipping along the ground threatened to crush them. They were

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in a hot place, and in the hope of getting out of danger they moved to the left. Every motion of theirs was plainly seen in the bright moonlight, and they had just got clear of the trail when bang! went battery No. 2, and scattered snow and stones in every direction. This capped the climax. The besiegers were demoralized. Cheers from the garrison, with an occasional command from the general to his mythical legions, completed their discomfiture. Believing that they were surrounded by an armed force, bewildered by noise, and terrified by the rocks that came crashing down-hill, they thought only of self-preservation, and rushed to find shelter in the timber, slipping down in the snow or stumbling over rocks in their flight.

The rout was complete, nor did the frightened wretches cease running until Chloride Gulch lay well behind them.

Matt and Tom, almost exhausted by their efforts and breathless from shouting and laughing, exchanged congratulations upon the result of the battle. They remained in the fort until morning, but the "Donnelly outfit" had had enough. They never again were seen near Oreville. The Boomerang remained


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in the peaceable possession of its owners, and was developed by them until it became a valuable mine. During the summer following the great battle it was sold for what Matt called "big money."

X

THE BOTTOM DROPPED OUT

How the Mine-Robbers Were Caught

T was a clear, cold evening. There was splendid sleighing, and cutters and sleighs of various descriptions sped up and down the main avenue of a certain lively mining-camp in the Rocky Mountains, while crowds of men passed along the wooden sidewalks, walking fast, as a rule, to keep warm. In front of a large jewelry-store stood a boy about fifteen years old, deeply enough absorbed in admiring the gold, silver, and precious stones spread out behind heavy panes of glass to be indifferent to either cold or crowd. He was trying so earnestly to decide whether a large diamond breastpin glistening in a morocco case was preferable to the heavily chased watch alongside of it, supposing he were to have his choice from all that magnificent col-

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lection of valuable articles, that he did not observe a man who came out of the store and looked at him keenly for several seconds, and he was a little surprised to feel a hand laid on his shoulder and to hear a strong voice say, pleasantly,

"Well, Jimmie, are you going to buy some Christmas diamonds?"

"No," answered the boy; "I haven't any money. But how did you know my name?"

"I didn't know it," replied the man, laughing. "I just guessed that a boy of your lively appearance would be called Jimmie, and it seems I was right. Now, Jimmie, would you like a sleigh-ride this fine night?"

"You bet I would!" responded Jimmie, eagerly, in the slang that is common in mining-camps.

"Come on, then, and you shall have a good one."

And the man, advancing to a team of black horses standing by the curb, quickly untied them and took his seat with Jimmie, who had already scrambled into the sleigh to which the horses were harnessed. Wrapping himself and his young companion in warm fur robes, of which there were plenty, the driver chirped

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briskly to his team, and in two minutes the avenue, with its glare and bustle, lay far behind. In front, only a mile or two away, was a great valley, and beyond that a huge mountain-range glistening in the moonlight. Snow covered the entire country, and Jimmie could see almost as well as in daytime. He was delighted with the view, and so pleased with his position that some time passed before he noticed how quietly the sleigh moved onward. There were no bells on the horses. This was a surprise and a source of regret. He pondered over it for a while, and then said, "I should think you'd have bells with such a fine turnout as this."

"Oh, I've got bells," answered the driver; "but one of the buckles was broken, so I didn't put 'em on to-night."

This explanation was quite reasonable; but Jimmie wished the broken buckle had been replaced by a new one. Bells add so much to the fun of sleighing.

The blacks were a very fine pair, and for nearly an hour they spun along at a swift trot. At last they turned from the hard, level valley road and began to ascend a hill.

"I believe," began Jimmie's new acquaint-

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ance, "that I'll go up to a mining claim just beyond here and get some samples of rock. We're so near it now, I can save making a journey from town on purpose."

"All right," assented Jimmie. "I'll hold the team while you get the rock."

A quiet laugh followed this remark, but there was no answer. In ten minutes more the horses came to a place where some mining work was being carried on, and were stopped. There was a shaft here and various piles of rock, with other things indicating that somebody was prospecting for mineral; but not a soul was in sight; not a sound broke the stillness, save the horses' panting. Jimmie's companion jumped out and hunted about among the rock piles for a few minutes, and then went to the shaft, down which he peered curiously.

"Jimmie," he said, turning toward the boy, "I want some rock from the bottom of this shaft. Will you go down and get it for me?"

"How 'll I get there?" asked Jimmie. "There isn't any windlass."

"No," replied the man; "it has been taken away."

"Is there a ladder?" inquired Jimmie.

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"No; and there is timber only part way down. The shaft is only twenty feet deep, though, and I can let you down by a rope and haul you up again easily enough." He had returned to the sleigh now, and was groping about under the seat. Presently he pulled out a coil of rope and an empty bag. "If you'll go down that shaft I'll give you five dollars."

He smiled as he said this, and Jimmie hesitated no longer. Five dollars was wealth to him, and there was no danger to be feared. The man was a big, strong fellow, who could hold two small boys on a rope.

"All right, pardner," said Jimmie, saucily, "I'm with you. Swing me off."

This speech produced another laugh, and a noose was quickly placed under Jimmie's arms. The bag was thrown down the shaft, and the boy followed, but more slowly. Indeed, his companion lowered him, hand over hand, with ease. Once at the bottom, Jimmie began selecting bits of rock from different places, as he had been instructed, and while thus engaged was astonished to see the entire rope come tumbling about his ears, the man above having let go of his end. A trick of some kind instantly suggested itself to Jimmie's mind, and

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he looked upward to remonstrate, but could see no one. He dimly heard shouts, however, and pistol-shots, and the conviction forced itself upon him that he had unwittingly taken a hand in some unlawful proceeding and been caught like a rat in a trap.

His first impulse was to call for help, but, reflecting that that might get him into trouble, he sat down in a dark corner of the shaft and waited. In a few minutes strange voices were heard above, and then all was quiet again.

"If ever a fellow was 'in a hole,'" soliloquized Jimmie, when his patience finally gave out, "it is me, and how I'm going to get out is more than I know. That big fellow brought me here to hook some specimens from this claim, and somebody ran him off. I'll bet he'll never think of the fix I'm in, or the five dollars he promised me."

But it was of no use to waste time in regrets, and Jimmie turned his thoughts to making an escape from his prison. If he could reach the shaft timbering overhead, it would be easy to climb out on that, but the lowest timber was too high to jump to, and, though he threw one end of his rope up in the hope that it would catch somewhere, it always came tumbling back,

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and at last that plan was given up in despair. Then he piled some pieces of rock in a heap, and tried to reach the timber from the top of it, but it was not high enough. There was a very large rock partly uncovered in the bottom of the shaft, and Jimmie thought that with that for a foundation the rock pile could be made a good deal higher, and he at once began to loosen it, using in his work an old pick that somebody had left in the shaft.

After working for about half an hour, Jimmie noticed that the rock settled a little, and, just as he was going to pry it from its bed, he was astonished to see it drop out of sight altogether and leave a ragged hole through which nothing could be seen but intense darkness.

"Well," remarked Jimmie to himself, "I have heard of the bottom of a shaft dropping out, but I never expected to see such a thing. It's done, though, and now I'd better find out where it went to."

Some bits of rock thrown down the hole struck bottom so quickly that it was plain the cavity below could not be very deep, and Jimmie, lying down and peering cautiously into the dark abyss, at last perceived the big rock

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about six feet from him. It seemed to be in a cave, but he could not be certain whether a natural or an artificial one.

"I might as well explore it," he soliloquized. "It may be a tunnel leading to the surface, or it may be a cave full of mineral."

The boy's father, being a miner, had taught him a good deal about underground work, and taken him on one prospecting expedition, so Jimmie didn't feel very uneasy in his strange position. His first move was to secure one end of the rope by piling rock on it, and then he lowered himself carefully into the hole. His feet touched solid ground almost immediately, and, waiting a few seconds to get accustomed to the darkness, he started slowly in a westerly direction. After going, as he thought, about forty feet, he came to a wall of rock with no opening at all in it, and he retraced his steps, passed under the hole, and continued on toward the east. He felt his way with extreme care, from fear of unseen openings, and at length saw a faint streak of light ahead. On coming to this, he found himself at the bottom of another shaft, and with great joy perceived a ladder leading to the world above. In a few seconds more he stood again in the calm moon-

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light, very thankful to be out of his subterranean dungeon.

Jimmie knew now that he had made his escape by means of a mining tunnel, but why it should have been driven under the shaft where he had been imprisoned puzzled him, and supplied food for reflection as he walked to the spot where he had left the team. He found no team there, but two men suddenly sprang out from behind a pile of rock, and, levelling rifles at him, called out,

“Throw up your hands.”

“Hold on, boys; don’t shoot,” cried Jimmie, pretty well scared now, and beginning to wonder where this night’s adventures would end. “I haven’t any money — the man didn’t pay me.”

Seeing that they were in no danger from one small boy, the men lowered their rifles, and one of them asked,

“What are you doing here, anyway?”

“Why,” answered Jimmie, “a big chap in a fur overcoat took me out sleigh-riding, and when we got here he offered me five dollars to go down that shaft and get him some samples of rock. He lowered me with a rope, and then threw the rope after me and ran away. I don’t

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know what his game was, but he left me in a hole, that's certain."

"What was his name?" asked one man.

"Don't know," replied Jimmie. "I never saw him before to-night."

"Look here, kid," said the other man, in a threatening tone, "we think you are lying. There's a scheme a-going to jump our claim here, and it looks as if you were mixed up in it. Now we've got you prisoner, and if you don't tell the truth we'll make it hot for you. Who is putting up this job?"

Jimmie knew very well that miners and prospectors were generally pretty rough men, who would not hesitate to take the law into their own hands, and he knew that he was in the power of these two fellows; but, conscious of his own innocence in this matter, he felt little fear of serious consequences to himself if he persisted in telling the truth.

"Hope I may die, pardner, if I haven't told you the straight truth," he said.

"Then how did you get out of our shaft after you were left at the bottom of it? There's no ladder."

"Got out through the back door," answered the boy, grinning.

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"Look here, now," exclaimed one man, angrily, "we don't want any funny business over this. Look out we don't thrash the nonsense out of you."

"You'll thrash nothing," retorted Jimmie, boldly. "If you don't know there's a back door, or a bottom door, to your shaft, it's about time you were told of it—that's all."

He then related his underground adventure, and the story astonished his hearers beyond measure, for it at once became plain that they were being robbed of ore by the owners of the Comet, which lay east of their own claim, the Tiara. They had stopped work on their shaft just before cutting into the tunnel secretly run from the adjoining claim, and the Comet people, taking advantage of this circumstance, were diligently abstracting Tiara ore and hoisting it out of the Comet's shaft. This trick has been played on his neighbor many a time by the "honest miner."

"Well, kid," said Jack, as one of the men was called, "you've let us into a great secret."

"But if you've lied to us," added Larry, the other man, "we'll bury you alive. If you've told the truth, we'll give you something handsome."

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“Go look for yourselves, if you don’t believe me,” replied Jimmie.

As daybreak was not far away, an investigation was quickly made, and Jimmie’s story concerning the tunnel was, of course, found true in every particular. Jack and Larry then laid a plan to catch the thieves. They first brought a small ore-bucket and a rope, and with these hoisted out the loose stuff which had fallen from the Tiara shaft into the tunnel, Jimmie being sent down to load the bucket. This move was to prevent the Comet men from suspecting anything wrong when they resumed work. Then some short boards were brought and lowered into the Tiara shaft, where they were used to cover the hole and exclude light from the tunnel.

“Now we’ll just sit on those boards,” said Jack, “and when those precious rascals have passed underneath us we’ll drop in and have ’em caged.”

The men clambered down, and Jimmie lowered their rifles to them. Then he concealed himself behind a pile of waste, but the Comet shaft was within range of his hiding-place. At about half-past seven two miners appeared and descended that shaft. Jimmie crawled out and warned his friends to be ready.

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Jack and Larry waited silently until two men passed under the trap and began work in the "breast" of the tunnel. Then, with quiet but rapid hands, the watchers uncovered the hole and dropped through, bringing their cocked rifles to bear on the ore-stealers and crying,

"Throw up your hands!"

"Not much will we," was the answer; "you've got to take us if you want us."

"If you move or blow out a light, we'll shoot," cried Jack.

It was an intensely dramatic scene. The ore-stealers stood in a blaze of light coming from several candles hung about on the walls; they were at the mercy of those two men, whose rifle-barrels reflected the farthest-reaching rays, but, daring and unscrupulous, they refused to surrender. A terrible silence followed, which was broken by a shrill voice crying from above:

"Hold 'em down, boys — hold 'em down! All the fellows are coming. They're right here now."

It was Jimmie's voice. He had hastily slid down the rope and witnessed the summons to surrender. Fearing that there might be a severe and bloody battle in that dark tunnel, his ready wit invented the fiction of a large re-

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inforcement close by, and it accomplished its purpose. The ore-thieves, who really had no firearms, gave up, and were taken as prisoners to the surface. Once there, they were filled with wrath at seeing how they had been duped, but it was then too late to resist.


The end of it all was that the ore-stealers were tried and sentenced to pay for the stolen ore, besides undergoing a term of imprisonment. Jimmie was rewarded with a pretty large sum of money and employment at the Tiara. He never again saw the man who left him in the shaft, but that made little difference, for, as he said himself,

“If he hadn’t done it, I’d never have dropped through the bottom of the shaft into such everlasting good-luck.”

XI

AN OUTLAW

A Story of Jim-Ned Creek

HE porch of Bishop's store — the heart, so to speak, of the Jim-Ned Creek settlement—was deserted, for the November day was bleak and raw. Half a score or more men lounged over the counters within, or sat silent and ruminant around the smouldering fire. Gideon Bishop, half hidden by his tall desk, was busy with his ledgers, but he glanced furtively and frowningly now and again at his guests.

The Outlaw came up the road at a leisurely pace. She was a small mare, blue-gray in color, with a flowing mane and tail of fine, glossy black, much matted with cockleburs. She tossed her small head coquettishly in response to the neigh of welcome from the horses hitched to the saplings about the store, and picked her

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way daintily to the very edge of the porch, where she stood saucily expectant.

“Hullo! There’s that blue *mustang* o’ yours!” exclaimed Sam Leggett, jumping down from the counter. “It’s been nigh onto two year sence she *vamoosed*, ain’t it, Uncle Gid? Where *hez* she been a-hidin’ herse’f?”

Mr. Bishop picked up a wagon whip, took a lariat from its nail on the wall, and stepped out upon the porch.

“So! You’ve come back, have you, Lady?” he said, with a grim smile. He reached forward as he spoke and attempted to slip the rope over the mare’s neck. She shook her mane gently, and, dipping her pretty head, nipped his forearm with her strong, white teeth.

At another time old Gid, stern and harsh as he was, might not have resented this playful salute, for the skin on his brown wrist was barely grazed, but he was in no mood for such fooling now. He started back with a quick step, his brow reddened angrily, and the fire leaped to his deep-set eyes. He lifted the whip; the long, keen lash curled through the air and descended with a stinging sound upon the runaway’s shining flank. She reared violently, uttering a cry almost human in its indignant

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protest; then she wheeled about and galloped away in the direction whence she had come.

The men who had trooped out upon the porch at Mr. Bishop's heels gazed after her until she disappeared in the creek bottom; then they slouched back to their seats.

"Jack broke that *mustang* hisse'f," Joe Trimble presently remarked. "I mind the first time he ever backed her. *Jing!* how she bucked!"

"Speakin' o' Jack," Newt Pinson ventured, in an offhand way, but not daring to look at Jack's father—"speakin' o' Jack, 'pears to me it's nigh about time we was huntin' that boy up."

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Bishop, in a loud, angry voice, "you 'tend to your own business, if—you—please. Jack Bishop is nineteen year old, and full able to take keer of hisse'f."

These words penetrated through a half-open door into the family living-room back of the store. On hearing them, Jack's mother burst into a fresh fit of weeping, which the kindly neighbors hovering about her tried vainly to soothe.

"He's just as oneasy about Jack as I am," she sobbed. "That onliest child of ourn is the

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apple of his father's eye. But it's Gid's pride as won't let him give up that a Bishop can get lost. And everybody's plumb afraid of him. Oh, my boy, my boy!"

"Don't ye worrit yo'se'f into a spazzum, Susy Bishop," said Granny Carnes. "*I ain't* afeard o' Gid Bishop, ner no other male creeter. An' I've give my orders to the boys a-settin' yander in the sto'. Ef Jack Bishop"—here she raised her voice to its highest and shrillest pitch—"ef Jack Bishop ain't inside this house befo' candle-lightin' to-night, them boys has got to tromp out an' find him, an' fetch him home, or not dassen to show their faces agin the len'th an' bre'th o' Jim-Ned."

"Amen!" said Mrs. Leggett and Mrs. Trimble together.

"Double an' thripple Amen!" added Mrs. Pinson, solemnly.

There was, indeed, no small cause for anxiety. Early on a Tuesday morning young Bishop had started out afoot, with dog and gun, for a few hours' hunting in The Rough—a belt of savage woodland which stretched away westward, with wide, solitary prairies on either side, to the chain of hills some fifteen miles distant. It was now Friday, past noon, and he had not

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returned. Newt Pinson had met him at the crossing of Jim-Ned Creek half an hour after he had left home; he had not been seen nor heard of since. He had gone on alone; for the dog, a half-grown puppy, had turned and trotted back, unnoticed, behind Mr. Pinson.

"Oh, if Josh was only with him!" moaned Mrs. Bishop, already alarmed, at the close of the first day.

And Josh, the intelligent old hound, rubbed his head against her knee and whined softly.

The lad—everywhere a favorite—had never absented himself from home before; and when Wednesday, Thursday, Friday came and went without tidings of him, the neighbors from up and down the creek began to gather at the store.

They looked at the heavy sky, sunless and misty these four days past, and shook their heads ominously, whispering among themselves. The poor mother was wellnigh frantic with alarm. Uncle Gid alone maintained an air of obstinate confidence, in the face of which no one dared venture a move.

"Jack Bishop is full able to take keer of hisse'f," he repeated, proudly, in answer to Mr. Pinson's timid suggestions. "Jack Bishop

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knows every inch of ground betwixt Jim-Ned and Rattlesnake Gap."

"All the same, notwithstandin'," whispered Granny Carnes in Mrs. Bishop's ear, "I've give my orders for candle-lightin', honey."

But before candle-lighting Mr. Bishop's assumed stoicism gave way. About sunset he arose and took his rifle from the rack above the door. "Come on, boys," he said, with a catch in his throat. And a moment later they were hurrying down the rutty road.

At the Jim-Ned crossing the old man paused. "You go back, Susy," he said, with rough kindness, to the frail little woman following a pace or two behind him. "Go back, and stay with the women folks. You ain't nowise fitten for this sort o' thing."

Jack's mother pulled the red knitted shawl closer about her head, and moved steadily forward. "No, Gid," she said, quietly; "I'm not going back—not without my boy."

He put an arm about her without another word, and husband and wife presently entered together the mysterious gloom of The Rough.

An hour or two later Jack Bishop was lying on the open prairie, where he had thrown him-

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self in a sort of dull despair. His loaded gun lay beside him; his empty wallet hung from his shoulder; his face looked pinched and wan in the vapory moonlight.

“I crossed Jim-Ned,” he was saying to himself, mechanically, for the thousandth time; “I crossed the creek and came into The Rough. I left home Tuesday at sun-up. . . . That puppy ain’t worth shucks; I wish I had brought old Josh! . . . I killed three jack-rabbits in Buck-Snort Gully. By the big cottonwood—what did I do by the big cottonwood? Oh, I ate my corn-pone. Gee! how hungry I am! . . . Then I followed a deer and got into the prairie. Why, I know this prairie ’most as well as I know Jim-Ned! Yonder’s Rattlesnake Gap, and yonder’s The Rough. . . . And before I knew it, it was plumb dark. . . . I went back into The Rough and tramped and tramped; and the first thing I knew I was out on the prairie again. . . . I’ve been doing the same thing ever since, over and over. . . . I haven’t seen a soul. . . . If I could just glimpse the sun! But seems like the sun never will shine again. . . . I reckon I’m lost. . . . Yonder’s Rattlesnake Gap and yonder’s The Rough—”

He got up and staggered a few steps, then

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sank down again. He was a manly lad, and he had borne with hopeful courage the hunger, cold, and loneliness of the long days and nights. But he was exhausted with fatigue and weakened by want of food; and finally, overcome by a sense of terror and desolation, he covered his face with his hands and groaned aloud.

The painful throbbing in his ears sounded suddenly like the rhythm of advancing footsteps. Something cold and moist touched his cheek; a warm breath mingled with his own.

“Why, Lady!” he cried, springing to his feet. Weariness and hunger and cold had vanished in a trice. Laughing and crying by turns, he clasped his arms about the neck of the little mustang which he had fed and petted as a colt—the wilful Outlaw who had disappeared into The Rough two years before.

Fearful lest the mare should desert him again, he held her long mane with one hand, while with the other he groped, stooping, for his rifle. But the Outlaw apparently did not dream of flight. She stood quite still until the gun was secured and he had climbed with some difficulty upon her back.

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"Now, Lady!" he shouted, "take me to Jim-Ned! Carry me home!"

Lady threw up her head, neighed, and moved obediently forward. She went at a swift walk, breaking at intervals into the long, swinging, restful mustang lope.

"But—you are going in the wrong direction," remonstrated her rider at the end of a few moments. He tugged at her mane, and endeavored to change her course. "You are carrying me *through* the Gap. Jim-Ned is on *this* side. Back, Lady—back!"

The mare shook herself impatiently and pushed on between the pyramidal hills which loomed up on either side of the Gap, emerging into the open prairie beyond just as the moon, scattering the clouds at last, filled earth and sky with a flood of golden light.

"Well," said Jack, with a shiver of disappointment, "you'll take me somewhere, I reckon, Lady. I can't be any more lost than I've been for the last three days."

After a while, however, things began to assume a strangely familiar look. "I've never been west of the Gap before," he muttered, "but—yonder looks like Comanche Mound. And, sure as shootin', here's Matchett's Pond!"

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Ah!" he added, after profound reflection, "I am east of the Gap now. I must have been all this time, somehow, on the other side."

His conjecture was correct. Stumbling unwittingly through the narrow Gap in the darkness of the first night, and deceived by the prairie and woodland beyond, he had there continued the incessant and bewildered round into which he had fallen when he had first lost his bearings.

"It's all clear as daylight now," he cried, joyously. "You've got a heap more sense than I have, Lady! Couldn't fool *you* with roughs and prairies! And now I think I will stretch my legs a little, and rest you, my beauty."

He slid to the ground and limped along beside his four-footed friend, leaning against her, and chattering boyishly as he went.

"'Tain't more'n ten miles to Bishop's store now. And mother 'll be on the porch, late as it is, looking out for me. Poor mother, I know she's been fretting! And she'll have the coffee-pot on the coals. And father 'll be pretending to scold. But, shucks! he won't mean a word of it. Seems like"—a lump arose in the boy's throat—"seems like I never understood father before, nor loved mother half enough! . . .

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Where have you been all this time, anyhow, Lady? Why, what a scratch you've got on your side! Run against a mesquit thorn, eh? It's all bloody. I'll doctor it the minute we get home. Hello!—"

One of his legs seemed all at once to have grown shorter than the other, a loud report rang in his ears, a thrill of intense agony racked his whole body, and he dropped fainting to the ground. He came to himself a moment later to find the blood pouring from a wound in his left shoulder, and when he attempted to rise and draw his leg from the deep rabbit-hole into which he had stumbled a sharp pain warned him that both knee and ankle were sprained or broken. He ceased his efforts and fell back, staring helplessly up at the sky.

The mustang, who had darted away at the discharge of the rifle, had returned, and was standing beside him.

"Don't go, Lady," he implored, catching at her mane. "I've shot myself, I reckon. I can't move my leg. Don't, *don't* leave me, Lady!"

The mare thrust her nose reassuringly against his face.

The blood, which he tried vainly to stanch

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with his free hand, oozed from the gunshot wound and formed a red puddle about his head. He felt himself growing dizzy and nauseated.

It was about an hour past midnight, and the vast, moonlighted prairie was hushed and still. Suddenly a curious sound troubled the silence — a trampling, tearing noise, accompanied by a hoarse, confused roar. Jack lifted his head a little and looked.

His heart stood still.

A small herd of cattle roving about the prairie, moved by the curiosity inherent in animals, had drawn near, and, excited by the smell of blood, were pawing the earth, bellowing with rage, and circling ever closer and closer about the helpless lad. He could see their wide horns glistening in the moonlight. "Mother! Father!" he breathed; and, dropping his head back upon the cold turf, he closed his eyes in instant expectation of death.

But he opened them again. For the Outlaw had whirled abruptly from her post beside him, and charged, with a snort, first into one section and then into another of the infuriated circle. Surprised and daunted, the cattle retreated a short distance, stopped, and stood still, uncertain and dumb.

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Hardly, however, had the boy drawn a breath of thankfulness and relief, when there was another mad rush upon him; and again the gallant little mustang, plunging and snorting, held his assailants at bay.

Over and over this assault and repulse were repeated. The half-unconscious lad turned his terrified eyes from side to side, groaning with pain and lifting his voice brokenly in encouragement of his protector.

But she, too, was beginning to be spent and exhausted. He stroked her trembling foreleg with his hand as she hovered over him in a moment of respite. "Poor Lady!" he whispered, faintly; "it's mighty nigh over with both of us, I think. You'd better save yourself now, Lady. You can't do anything more for me. Don't cry, Lady. *Why, Lady, your eyes are just like mother's!*"

And with a sob he lapsed into utter oblivion.

The searching-party came out of The Rough in the early dawn, and stood huddled together, forlornly silent, on the prairie ridge that sloped gently away to Matchett's Pond. They were foot-sore and disheartened after their long night's fruitless quest.

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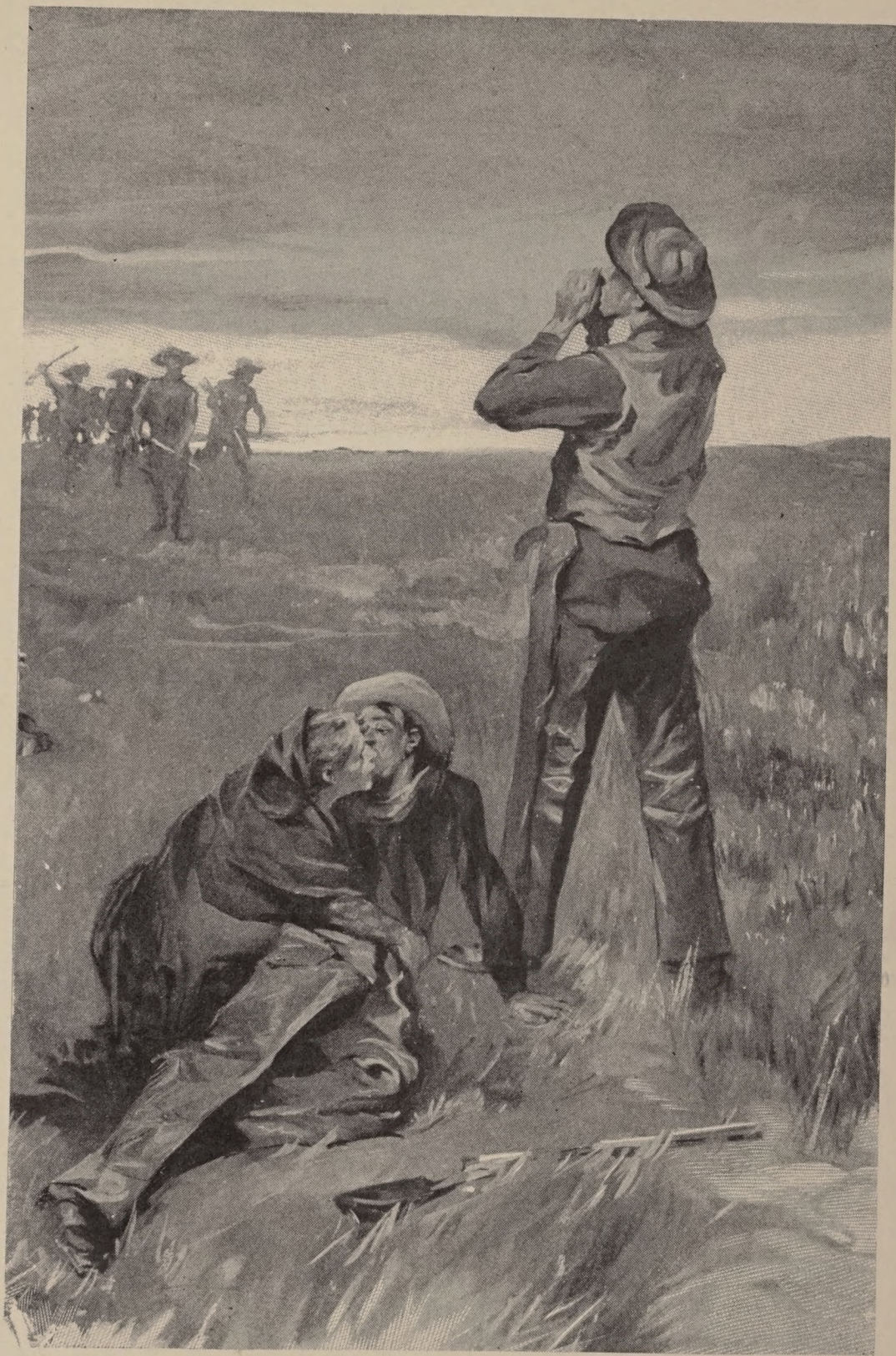
"Ain't that Matchett's bunch o' cattle rampagin' an' bellerin' aroun' down yander?" demanded Joe Trimble, breaking the silence and peering forward curiously. "What are they up to? *Y-a-a-h!*"

He burst into a loud yell and set off running at the top of his speed, discharging his pistol as he ran to scatter the herd.

Swift-footed as he was, however, a woman outstripped him; and, by the time the others came up, Jack's mother was kneeling in the grass, and her arms were about her boy.

When Jack, after swallowing a mouthful of water, had revived a little, and the color had begun to come back into his poor, pale face, his wound was dressed and his broken leg bandaged. Then he faltered out the story, with his head on his mother's bosom and his hand held close in his father's strong grasp.

"I could feel the fire in their blazing eyes," he concluded. "I thought I would never see you and mother again, father. And if it hadn't been for Lady— Don't cry, mother, I'm all right now. *Why, mother, your eyes are just like Lady's!*"



JACK'S MOTHER WAS KNEELING IN THE GRASS WITH HER ARMS
ABOUT HER BOY

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Uncle Gid got up and walked over to where the Outlaw lay panting on the dry grass. He reeled like a fainting man as he went. At his approach the mare threw out her slender forelegs and tried to get up, but fell feebly back, quivering with terror. The old man dropped on his knees beside her, and laid his hand on the welk that disfigured her flank. "Heaven forgive me for a sinful man!" he cried. "I struck you in anger, Lady; I struck you; and if it hadn't been for you, my son, my only son—" A sob choked his utterance, and he could not finish. But Lady turned her head toward him and whickered softly. She understood!

There was a moment of awed silence.

Then Mr. Pinson blew his nose, wiped his eyes, and stepped forward. "Gentlemen *an'* Mis' Bishop," he said, with an oratorical flourish, "Lady is a honor to her sect! The female sect, gentlemen *an'* Mis' Bishop, is ever faithful *an'* ever true. Lady, notwithstanding' she air a mare *an'* a Outlaw—"

"Three cheers for Lady!" interrupted Jack, with the old sparkle in his eyes, though his voice was a bit unsteady. "Hurrah for Lady! Hip, hip, hur-r-a-a-h!"


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And such cheers went ringing over the prairie and across The Rough that old Granny Carnes afterward declared she heard them at Bishop's store, ten miles away.

XII

A FRONTIER PATRIOT

Defending the Flag

N the Fourth of July, 1894, the main street of Thomasville, Dakota, was entirely deserted of the usual loungers in front of its stores, for the male population, and some of the female, for the matter of that, were gathered at the station, where stood an overland train to which were attached several Pullman cars. Not a wheel of the train had turned for six days, and the besieged passengers had resigned themselves to the inevitable—the scarcity and poorness of food and the exorbitant prices charged for the bare necessities—and waited and hoped for the coming of United States troops, news of which they had in some mysterious way, as no communications were made

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known that were not wholly favorable to the strike.

Though so far there had been no active demonstration against the train since the engine had been "killed," to-day a feeling of dread possessed the passengers, for the national holiday was to be celebrated by the strikers, and what would happen before night no one knew. And the citizens of Thomasville were not such as are calculated to inspire ideas of peace or security; great, brawny men they were, who stood about in their shirt-sleeves, with large, soft, felt hats jammed on their heads. Every man carried a "gun" at his hip, some even showed two.

To-day the water-tank at the end of the long platform appeared to be the rallying-point, and the people had an air of expectancy that developed into cheers as one man was seen to climb the crossed beams and supports until he stood beside the wooden reservoir, and from that elevation survey his audience with immense satisfaction. But his expression changed to intense hatred when his eye rested on a young man wearing the conductor's uniform who was an earnest though quiet spectator as he stood at the end of the train.

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The man at the tank began a speech bristling with praise of the strike and the success that was bound to attend it; he berated capital in terms that left nothing to be desired in the minds of his listeners, and he finished by saying: "They call this a country of freedom, boys; but it's being ground under the iron heels of capitalists, and freedom ain't in it, it can't be, as long as we let them control things. But you can jus' gamble your whole outfit that their reign is over, and it won't be long before the Stars and Stripes float over a country that is free—free of capital and capitalists, and governed by labor for labor. And to-day, boys, bein' the day that liberty was declared on over a hundred years ago, we'll start over again and drape the old flag in crape for the death of the Government that has encouraged—yes, it has made — capital, and we'll have a birthday of freedom that is freedom!"

He stopped and the crowd broke into cheers, sending off their guns in testimony of approval, and the speaker was about to descend from his perch when one more shot caused them to turn and see that it had come from the conductor's revolver, and that he had stepped forward with his lips quivering.

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"I've been listenin' to your friend's speech, boys; now you listen to mine. The first man who puts two inches of crape on the old flag settles with me for it. It ain't thirty years since my father fought and died for the Stars and Stripes, and no man can do better than that now. But I ain't a-goin' to have to. You know too much to fire on a man for standin' by the flag! You're all crazy, boys, every one of you. You're drunker on strike than ever you was on whiskey, and you're goin' to have a bad time gettin' sober. If you think the United States is goin' to knuckle under to a lot of strikers, you're backin' the wrong color, that's all I've got to say, and I'll drink a quick journey over the line to any man that wants to see our Government ditched, and I'll help to send him there. You used to be friends of mine; this is my home, and I'd have stood by you. But you played me a skulkin' trick, stoppin' my train and killin' my engine, and you're nothin' but yaller greasers that no white would have for a friend. That's all, except till the troops get here I'll guard the old flag myself. Better not forget." And he walked back and seated himself on the car-steps.

For a moment the crowd was silent, then be-

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gan to mutter and glance threateningly at the conductor, who was talking to one of the passengers. Gradually, however, it thinned, and a man walked to the train official.

“Better give it up, Barbour; you can’t do it. The only reason you warn’t dropped now was the boys liked your grit, for the game warn’t going your way; but that didn’t bluff you. You ain’t no coward, Jim, we know that, but you’ve got a wife and kid, an’ you’ve got to remember ’em.”

“That’s just the deal, Gammon. I have got a wife an’ kid, and I mean to do my share to keep the flag respected an’ this country safe for a man’s family. You strikers can talk big, but you can’t harm Uncle Sam, and I mean to stand by him and walk a free man while you rot in prison. Sorry to talk like this to you, Tom, but that’s the trail I’m followin’, and the sooner you all know it the better.”

Gammon stared a moment and walked away without replying.

“I’ll trail round after that procession,” Barbour said to himself, “and, when the boys know my blood is up, I reckon they’ll let Old Glory wave ’thout any black mixed in.”

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True to his resolution, Barbour followed the motley and unorganized parade, keeping always a certain distance from the flag; but no attention was paid to him or to the colors, and Barbour congratulated himself that his presence was a restraint.

At the hotel, amid much shouting and calls and cheers, the procession disbanded, and he saw the flagstaff stuck in a socket by the entrance, where its colors hung in limp folds, and was about to turn away when the man who had addressed the strikers stepped up, and, pulling a piece of rusty black crape from his pocket, threw it over the flag. Scarcely had it settled in place when Barbour was upon him, and with one blow of his clinched fist laid the man at his feet. Then with a quick movement he snatched off the crape, and, throwing it down, trod it into ribbons. None of the bystanders interfered; each man's fight is his own, and a clean, square blow is a thing to be respected. Barbour prodded the man with his foot, and he opened his eyes dazedly.

"Try that again," Barbour said, slowly, "and you won't be able to open your eyes. I'd 'a' killed you now, but you ain't worth it." Unable to find words to express himself, he

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stopped. "I'll give you one more chance," he concluded. "Don't throw it away."

The man had scrambled to his feet, and some one brought him a drink, which he swallowed thirstily. He was breathing hard, but with a great effort he controlled himself. His score could be settled through other people, he thought, and he spoke to Barbour, utterly ignoring the recent encounter.

"I was going to say, Mr. Barbour, that we've given you just two hours to join us and be a member of the finest association in the States, and when they're up we'll go to your house for answer. And I don't mind tellin' you, man to man, that I'd advise you to join. Savvy?"

Barbour's eyes were blazing with wrath and his hands were clinched. He eyed the man from head to foot for a second, then answered, with a voice in which rage and contempt were mingled:

"I am sorry for any organization you represent. Why, even a tenderfoot could spot you for a blackleg and scoundrel. I wouldn't join you, not if I knew I was goin' to make my everlastin' fortune or be dropped the nex' minute for refusin'. Now you've got my answer, I don't believe there's anythin' more to say;

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but I expect to be home in two hours, if you should want to see me agin."

The man scowled and turned to go into the house: "You think you're smart, but wait an' see how you like your medicine."

"Well," Barbour said, cheerfully, "if you're mixed up in it, of course I won't like it, for I couldn't like nothin' you was connected with, even if it was heaven." He took the flag from its socket and raised it to his shoulder. "I'll keep this with me," he said, carelessly. "I can look after it better."

The man took a step forward.

"Give that to me!" he demanded.

"Old Glory never waves over a traitor when there is a friend to defend it," Barbour replied. "The Stars and Stripes is mine. You'd better hoist a skull an' crossbones. That's your kind." And he turned away and started for his home, a mile east of the town.

At the cabin door stood Barbour's wife, waiting for him, and the small boy, catching sight of his father, left the task of filling shells for his rifle and ran out to meet him.

"I've got a lot of 'em ready now, dad—a lot—and if any of the strikers come round I'm goin' to pot 'em. Can't I?"

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"Well, you are a bloodthirsty young citizen," Barbour said, clasping his son's hand and continuing on his way. "What do you want to pot 'em for?"

"For keepin' your train here an' talkin' so to you. If I was big I'd go in town an' do it, but ma won't let me out of her sight. Say, dad, ma was cryin' this mornin'. Do you know what for?"

"Well, I can't be sure, sonny," his father said, gravely. "Maybe you was worse than usual."

"I 'ain't," the boy denied, indignantly. "I 'ain't been bad at all. Just ask her!"

"'Ain't you? Maybe she was worried 'cause you was too good. 'Tain't your natural state, son. Well, here I am, Jen, skin whole. There ain't so much as a scratch about me, an' hungry enough to eat the whole outfit."

"Dinner's ready an' waitin', Jim. I've been watchin' this half-hour. What was all them shots for in town this mornin'? I got so worried I near went over to see. An' what have you got the flag for?"

"Thought we'd celebrate the Fourth, Jen, an' put it up here," Barbour said, carelessly, producing a bit of cord and lashing the staff to

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one of the porch posts. "There ain't wind enough to float it," he continued, eying it affectionately, "but it looks kind of patriotic, don't it? Say, Jacky, that's the bulliest flag in the whole world, an' you stand by it always, though you drop for it."

Seated in the big kitchen, that was kept as cool as the weather permitted, Barbour recounted the events of the morning; but the narration was modified to suit his audience, and of his encounter with the striker, and the threats that had been made, he said nothing.

"But I've heard that troops have started out from Sully, an' they may get here to-morrow, or even to-night; it depends on how much the strikers can do along the line to hinder 'em. But they're goin' to put my train through to the coast if it takes all the soldiers Uncle Sam's got, an' we'll be as peaceful as kittens in three days—see if we ain't."

"Ain't the men mad about the troops comin'?" Mrs. Barbour asked.

"Well, I didn't think to ask 'em—I really didn't," Barbour said, with the air of one who admits an oversight.

"You shut up, Jim Barbour," the woman

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replied, good-naturedly. "You'd have your joke if you was dyin'!"

"It don't do no harm to keep jolly, old girl. Seen my tobacco?" he asked, taking a much-blackened pipe from his pocket. "I'll have a smoke before I go back." He had taken off his coat and was sitting in his shirt-sleeves, tilted back in his chair, and half rocking, with his feet on another. It was quarter of two; it lacked fifteen minutes of the limit of time he had told the strike leader he would be at home, but he meant to wait a half-hour later than that.

"Say, girl, your gun in order?" he asked, suddenly.

His wife stopped clearing the table.

"Why?" she demanded.

"Was only wonderin'," Barbour said, puffing his pipe lazily. "You're pretty quiet, Jacky. What mischief you hatchin' now?"

"Nothin'. I'm fillin' shells. Say, dad, how many strikers is there?"

"Shouldn't wonder if there was most a hundred, son."

"Well, I've got nearly shells enough for 'em all, then," the boy said, after a short silence, while he counted his ammunition.

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"You're the most dangerous chap I've come across yet," Barbour remarked. "Glad you're on my side. I'd hate to buck up agin you."

The heat seemed to be radiating in great waves from the prairie, and the stillness outside was intense. Barbour was taking a cat-nap, though the pipe was still between his teeth. He had reached the stage where exhaustion dominates mental anxiety, and no sooner had the opportunity come than he began to make up the sleep he had been losing for a week. The boy was packing a cartridge-belt with the shells he had filled, and his mother was working by the window, out of which she glanced absently; then, with a smothered exclamation, put down the steaming kettle she held. Again she looked out on the trail, then went to her husband and laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Jim," she said, quietly.

He opened his eyes instantly.

"Eh, what is it? Oh, you, Jen! I was dreamin' I was on the train."

"Jim, dear," the woman repeated, "there's trouble at last! The boys are comin' down the trail—a crowd of 'em. They'll be here in five minutes. What can we do?"

Barbour had jumped to his feet and gone

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to the window. "Yes, there they are, as drunk a lot as you could find. Do, girl? Nothin' but stand our ground. Question is, what 'll they do? Give me your gun."

"You've got one of your own, 'ain't you?" Mrs. Barbour asked.

"Yes, here," her husband answered, with his hand on his hip.

"Then I'll keep mine to use myself. Ain't there no one to help us? Not one?"

"No, indeed; but don't you worry. We'll stand 'em off all right. Jacky!" he called; then, as the boy came running to him, "there may be trouble here, son, an' you keep away from the windows an' door. Understan' what I say, an' mind your mother the minute she speaks. If you don't, I'll give you the biggest larrupin' later you ever had in your life."

"Please, daddy, can't I be in the fun?" the boy teased. "Please; I've got so many shells, an' they're no good, except for my rifle!"

"You're likely to be in it more than I wish you was," his father said, grimly. "Stand steady, girl," he continued to his wife; "they're most here now. No, don't close that door. Leave it open."

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"But we don't want 'em comin' in," the woman remonstrated.

"No, I'm goin' out to them. Do you s'pose I'd have 'em think I was afraid?"

He started to the door, and his wife, knowing the uselessness of opposition, went quickly to a shelf and took from it a loaded revolver, which she dropped in her apron pocket; then, with her hand still on the butt, followed her husband to the door, out of which he went, and down the one step to the ground, so that he stood on a level with the throng that was now in front of the house. The orator of the morning was at their head, and near him was Gammon. It was to him that Barbour spoke.

"Well, what do you want?" he demanded.

But the strike leader answered: "The time I mentioned in our conversation is up, Mr. Barbour, an' my brother associates is come for their answer. Are you with us or agin us?"

"I told you this mornin' I was agin you," Barbour said, shortly. "Say, Gammon, what's his name?" with a nod to the spokesman.

"Darrell."

"Well, Mr. Darrell, s'pose you go back where you came from."

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"No hurry, Mr. Barbour. We've got some business, an' we want you in it."

"Well, you won't get me."

"Maybe Mrs. Barbour can persuade you," Darrell continued, with a glance at the woman. "If not, we'll try. Won't you ask us in to sit down?"

"No," Barbour replied, curtly.

"It don't matter," the spokesman responded. "Look here," he began, rapidly, "the troop-train 'll be here to-night. Never mind how I know. An' they mean to go on, an' if they get to Edgartown the strike will be broke, jes' as you say. They mustn't get there. Savvy? If we hold out three days longer we win, an' the troops must be stopped here, an' the train, too, for some of the road officers is aboard."

"Bully!" shouted Barbour. "I thought the road wouldn't stand everythin'! Why, nothin' could stop 'em now!"

"You can."

"I!" Barbour ejaculated, too astonished to say more.

"Yes," Darrell went on. "This way: the conductor got a clip on the head with a rock back at Milton, when they stopped there this mornin', an' he's laid up. They're goin' to

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leave him here an' take you on to-night. You're to run 'em to Edgartown."

"See here," Barbour interrupted suspiciously, "how do you know so much?"

"That's my business; but I'm givin' it to you straight. The road knows you've been faithful to 'em"—Barbour's face beamed with a stern smile—"an' you'll be in charge of the troop-train; an' here's what you've got to do, for there ain't no one else can: Forty miles west of here there's a long up-grade, with a curve at the bottom an' a sidin' there; you know it. We're goin' to let the train leave here with you on board, an' when it gets to the top of that grade you be in the car nex' to the engine an' let go the couplin'. You'll be all right, an' the rest of the train 'll go humpin' back like lightnin', an' the sidin' 'll be open then, and, when it strikes, the cars 'll make good kindlin'-wood for the ranches. Get on to it? We're goin' to send two men on to look after the switch, and we'll make the uncouplin' easy for you. We'll teach 'em what it is to buck agin men that's fightin' for their rights."

Barbour's face was livid.

"Your rights!" he exclaimed. "You dogs! if you had your rights you'd all be in states-

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prison now. And that's where you all will find yourselves if you don't stop and think before carrying out your threats."

For an instant it seemed as though the speaker would choke with rage, and Darrell had drawn his gun and held it muzzle down. Mrs. Barbour, back of her husband, took an impulsive step forward and then stopped, but her eyes never left Darrell, and her hand was in her apron pocket.

"Do you know what you want me to do?" Barbour went on. "Why, it's murder—wholesale murder! An', besides that, it's betrayin' the trust the road puts in me! Why, it's the most rascally plot that was ever hatched, an' I tell you there ain't no power on earth, or above or below, as 'll make me help in it, an' if I can I'll stop it — God helpin' me, I will!"

"Well, you can't," Darrell said, "and you'll do what we say." His moment of revenge had come, and he gloated in it. "You're a great man, you are! You knocked me down this mornin'. It's my turn now! You pull down that flag an' drop your guff or we'll see that you do. That right, boys?"

A shout of approbation greeted Darrell, and,

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strengthened by his backing, he continued, significantly:

"When a broncho tries to go his own way the cowboy has means of makin' him change his mind. Savvy? You're game. We know that; but you're goin' to play our han' this roun'."

"Not while I've got one breath in my body!" Barbour replied, undaunted.

"Well, we don't want to send you out, do we, Gammon?" Darrell said, easily, revelling in his power. "That is, not unless you make us," he added, with a sinister change of tone. "That's for you to say; but we'll try persuadin' first," he continued, devilishly. "Maybe you recollect' how Jones got them two horse-thieves to tell what they'd done with the horses awhile back. Jus' staked the men out even, with their feet over a heap of good coals. Jones got the horses that night, an' the men was lyin' with bullets through their heads. He didn't think there was any use of their livin' 'thout their feet. Don't you think he'll take down his Old Glory an' do what we want, boys?"

Before Darrell had finished speaking the mob had caught his idea, and, with the demon of drink within them, it was greeted with a

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cheer of fiendish delight. There was an instantaneous movement, and three or four men ran to the woodpile and began to pick up kindlings, and others shouted: "Wire! Cut the telegraph wire!"

"Try the corral!" somebody answered. And with a curious sensation Barbour recollected the coil of wire that had been put there to repair the corral fence, and in a flash he saw, in his imagination, the mob wiring down his legs below the knees and his arms above the wrists. It was no empty threat they were making. The Indians were taught much by the white men, and the whites in turn learned from the Indians.

The triumphant shout that greeted the reappearance of the men with the wire was redoubled when two others followed waving iron pickets and yelling,

"These are better than green wood to peg out with!"

Already a fire had been lighted, and the little tongues of flame were growing larger and crackling fiercely as dry wood was heaped on. Since Darrell had spoken, Barbour had stood immovable, but no detail of the preparations had escaped him. His wife's position had not

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changed, but at Darrell's first intimation of torture she had drawn her hand from her pocket, and it hung at her side, the pistol concealed by the folds of her apron.

Darrell and Gammon divided their attention between watching Barbour and the work; and as he saw the men who were pounding the stakes dodge the smoke and flames they were uncomfortably near, Darrell's face was distorted with malignant joy. Over the crowd itself a curious stillness had fallen, and the sound of ringing blows as the iron pegs were driven home was the only break in the great hush of the prairies.

As the last blow was struck the men massed themselves behind Darrell — all but two who fed the fire. Darrell's eyes swept the entire scene.

"All ready?" he asked.

Again came the yells that were only half human, and the men surged forward, moved by a common impulse. Darrell shouted at them, and his voice rose above their cries, that had sunk to a strangely deep pitch.

"Hold up a minute till we give him a show!" he howled. They only half stopped; the desire to torture and kill was stronger in them

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now than Darrell could control, and their feet were pounding the ground as he faced Barbour fiendishly and asked,

“Do you join us?”

Barbour's voice rang out above the tumult.

“No!”

A frenzied yell broke from the men, and with Darrell at their head they swept toward Barbour, who quickly raised his gun, levelled it at Darrell, and dropped him as the mob was scarcely six yards from the pistol.

“Stop!” he shouted. “The first man who comes a step nearer drops, too! You cowards! Stop and look at a *man*!”

With his eyes holding those nearest him who had halted instinctively as they faced the gleaming barrel, Barbour could not see a man at one side taking aim. He only heard the report of a rifle, followed by Jacky's voice crying, excitedly:

“He was gettin' the drop on you, dad, but I got him!—I got him! I've got my rifle, and I'm with you, dad!”

The sensation of pride that Barbour had was that of the Spartans when their sons set out to the wars, and it showed itself in the glow that lighted his face for a second, then faded, leav-

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ing it as set as before. The revolver was still covering the crowd, and he spoke again, not loudly, but with a distinctness and force irresistible:

“Get out of here, every one of you! I’m not afraid. You know it. Now get! In three minutes I don’t want to see one of you about this corral. Any one that is ’ll take the same trail as that thing you’ve had for a leader. I’m a man of my word, and my gun is on you. When I count three, I want to see every man goin’!”

A deadly silence was over the throng. They saw what Barbour could not — that one step behind, with her pistol covering them, was Mrs. Barbour, and close to her skirts was Jacky, his rifle at his shoulder.

The first step that Barbour took his wife and son moved, too, at the same pace, and the “One!” he spoke floated out and was swallowed in the vastness of the still plains. The crowd swayed irresolutely, and Barbour stood a moment with his finger on the trigger, then moved again deliberately.

“Two!” he said and waited, and the woman and child were beside him.

“There’s only one step more!” He was

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standing firmly, but as he spoke Barbour shifted his weight and poised it on his left foot preparatory to moving, and the brown mass was still swaying. He raised his foot and was about to speak when Gammon exclaimed:

“I’m hanged if I fight a woman and a kid, boys! We’ll get out of this. The game’s up.”

A smothered assent answered him, and the crowd separated and began a broken and disordered retreat. Barbour continued to face them, but their demoralization was complete. He watched until they were an indistinct mass, and then his gaze left them and went to the fire still burning and to the two inert bodies upon the ground, and he wiped the sweat from his forehead and sat down upon the step. Mrs. Barbour laid her hand on his shoulder, an unusual mark of demonstration from her, and Jacky crept up fearfully, visions of a larruping before him for breaking the parental command.

“I didn’t mean to, dad,” he said, pleadingly, “’deed I didn’t, but he said to pull down the flag, and he’d ’a’ dropped you, and I couldn’t let you stand there ’thout another man with you, could I?”

Barbour picked up the embryo man and sat him on his knee.

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“ You stood by the flag like a soldier, Jacky, and you helped break the strike at Thomasville, for it’s busted! But I hope the next one ’ll come in cool weather. It’s a very hot day to work.”

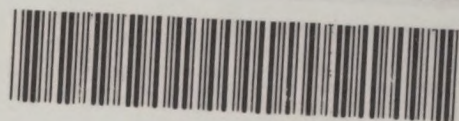
THE END

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